Shi'i Islam

Origins, Faith & Practices

Mohammad A. Shomali

'Dr Shomali has written a concise and scholarly introduction to the distinctive teachings of Shi'i Islam, its cultural and intellectual as well as doctrinal features, its historical unfolding and contemporary situation. He is to be congratulated on his achievement.'

Hamid Algar
Professor of Persian and Islamic Studies
University of California, Berkeley

In six concise clearly-written chapters, Mohammad Shomali provides a scholarly and well-documented introduction to the principal features of Shi'i Islam, an important school of Islamic thought which has gained increasing prominence in Western media in recent years.

Beginning with an examination of the term Shi'i - stressing its occurrence in numerous traditions of the Prophet, so that the origins of Shi'ism can be regarded as coterminous with those of Islam itself - the author then moves to a discussion of the textual and other sources of Shi'i thought: The Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet, the teachings of the Infallible Imam from the Household of the Prophet, and the principles of reason and consensus as distinctively understood in Shi'ism.

He follows with a review of the leading doctrines of Shi'i Islam, both those it holds in common with other Muslims and those that set it apart - divine justice, the Imamate, and the infallibility of the Imams, The devotional Practices of Shi'i Islam are presented in turn, followed by a review of its general characteristics, with stress on both spirituality and rationality.

Concluding with a demographic survey of Shi'i populations and brief notes on cities with sacred associations, the book is care fully argued, and can be recommended as a useful source of reference for all those interested in Islamic studies.

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In the Name of Allah the Compassionate the Merciful
All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all worlds

Mohammad A. Shomali

SHĪʿĪ ISLAM

Origins, Faith and Practices

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Introduction

Before the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, very little was written about Shī'i Islam in Western (Occidental) languages. Knowledge about this branch of the Islamic faith was mostly limited to a very few academics who specialized in Islamic studies or in Oriental languages, especially Persian. There were also diplomats, tourists and tradesmen who had some rudimentary knowledge of Shī'a states and communities in the Middle East through their personal experiences and contacts.

However, the establishment of an Islamic government in Iran under the leadership of the Shī'a 'Ulamā' (scholars), particularly Ayatollah Khomeini, aroused further interest in the Shī'a faith. The Islamic revolution not only played an important role in the revival of Islamic awareness and movements throughout the globe and had a massive impact on the world economy and politics, but also fuelled a desire among the general public as well as among politicians and the mass media to know more about Shī'i Islam. Certain events in the last two decades, such as the uprisings of the Shī'a of Iraq and other Arab countries in the region, the increasing presence of Shī'a emigrants in the West and the leading role of Shī'a

militants in fighting against the occupation of south Lebanon and liberating occupied territories, have added to this interest.

Naturally many research projects have been carried out and more literature has been produced on different aspects of Shī'i Islam. Although many reliable and scholarly works have been produced, the author cannot deny his deep concerns about some of the publications in English in this area. Some have been written by authors who have not had profound and sound acquaintance with the subject. Others have even been written out of bias and hatred towards what they see as this *threatening* phenomenon. Yet others are principally valid, but unfortunately are not methodically organized or they are poorly written and so do not meet the needs and expectations of English readers. There remains, therefore, a great and indeed increasing need for further research and publications on the topic.

The present work represents a humble attempt to fill some of the gaps that exist in the field of Islamic studies in general and Shī'i studies in particular. Though simply and clearly written, it is an outcome of nearly twenty years of involvement in Islamic studies and Western philosophy, and based to some extent on two series of lectures about Shī'a Islam delivered to English-speaking audiences: a first set of some fifty lectures delivered at Jāmi'at al-Zahrā' (the leading Islamic seminary for female students) in Qum in 1995 and 1996, and a second set of about thirty lectures delivered at the Manchester Islamic Institute and the Shī'a Welfare Centre in Manchester in 1998 and 1999.

The first chapter starts by expounding on both the literal and technical meanings of the term 'Shī'a' and referring to statements of famous scholars in this regard. It proceeds to studying the origins

of Shī'i Islam and its subsequent development in the formative years of Islam.

The second chapter studies the sources of Shī'i thought, i.e. the Qur'ān, the Sunnah, reason and consensus. Discussing the status of the Qur'ān, the chapter goes on to establish that the Shī'a, like other Muslims, believe in the version of the Qur'ān that is available today and that Shī'a scholars, from the early ages until today, have denied and continue to deny any alleged alteration of the Qur'ān. It also explains that the *Muṣḥaf of Fāṭima*, which is mentioned in some Shī'i ḥadīths, has nothing to do with the Qur'ān and that the term 'Muṣḥaf' here, as in many other places, is used in its original meaning, that is, 'book'.

The chapter then discusses the second most important source, the Sunnah, which includes the sayings, actions and tacit approval of the Prophet Muḥammad. The Qur'ān itself asks Muslims to take the Prophet as their role model, to refer to him to judge and settle their conflicts, and speaks of the Prophet as the one who recites, teaches and explains the Qur'ān. This chapter also deals with the necessity of compiling the Prophetic traditions, and describes how the Shī'a, from the very beginning, were determined to register and narrate them while the non-Shī'a Muslims were still under orders not to record or even narrate ḥadīths, a situation that continued for nearly a century. The chapter also refers to the Household of the Prophet (*Ahlul Bayt*) and its members' role in presenting the Sunnah. There follows a discussion on the importance of reason and its role in understanding beliefs, values and practical laws or, in other words, on theology, morality and jurisprudence. Finally the author deals with legal consensus (*al-ijmā'*) and how it is reduced to the Sunnah in the Shī'i perspective.

The third chapter studies some of the theological doctrines of the Shī'i faith. After a short account of Islam and its principles, i.e. the Unity of God, prophethood and resurrection, some important additional doctrines are studied. These doctrines may partly be shared by other Muslims, but the Shī'a are those who believe in all of them.

The fourth chapter is a very brief account of Shī'i practices along with brief reference to the objectives and principles underlying them. These practices are in principle shared by all Muslims, though there may be some differences in particulars among different Islamic schools.

The fifth chapter studies the three major features of Shī'i Islam: spirituality, rationality and seeking justice. These three stand very prominently in both the theory and the history of Shī'i Islam. In discussing spirituality, references are made to the significance of morality and the spiritual path. Among different manifestations of spirituality in Shī'i Islam is the rich literature on supplications, especially *Al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādīyah*, translated into English as *The Psalms of Islam*.

The sixth and final chapter is a short discussion of the Shī'i world today. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part briefly surveys the latest statistics about the present Muslim and Shī'i population of the world. There is also a breakdown of religious affiliations of some countries that have a long history of Shī'i presence. Though there are no universally accepted statistics on the current world Shī'a population, efforts have been made here to collect the most up-to-date and accurate documented information on the subject. The second part of the chapter introduces the reader to the major holy cities for Shī'a Muslims and their sites of pilgrimage and religious visitation.

In general, the present work aims to answer the questions that anyone interested in finding out about Shī'i Islam might ask. It therefore serves as an introductory source on the essential features of this school. At the same time, the author hopes, by virtue of the style and language of the book and the data and the arguments presented in it, also to help to those who are already familiar with this faith but want to acquire more authentic information, systematically and methodically presented, about its origins, faith, practices and its contemporary configuration in human terms.

I should also say that the present work embodies a deep commitment to Islamic unity and express the hope that it represents a modest step towards Muslim brotherhood. In fact, one of the best means to achieve this unity and brotherhood is to enhance mutual comprehension and overcome the historical prejudices that prevent understanding between different schools. According to an Arabic proverb, 'People are enemies of what they do not know'. It is true that the seedbed of hatred is ignorance of the other; whereas the seedbed of love is knowledge of the other. For this reason and for the benefit of the non-Shī'a, references to central Shī'i doctrines have also been given from major Sunni sources.

Finally, I should like to take this opportunity to thank all the individuals and organizations that have encouraged or helped me during the period of lecturing and preparing for this work, namely Jāmi'at al-Zahrā' (Qum), Manchester Islamic Institute, Shī'a Welfare Centre (Manchester), Ayatollah Muhsin Arākī, Mr Muhsin Ja'far, Dr 'Ali Heshmati and Mrs Badr al-Sādāt Omrānī. I should also like to thank Professor Hamid Algar, Dr Reza Shah Kazemi, Dr Muhammad Legenhausen, Mr Abbas Virjee and Mrs Nazmina Virjee for reading the draft of this work and offering valuable comments. I wish especially to thank the Islamic College for Advanced Studies

in London and in particular its knowledgeable director, Dr Ja'far Elmi, for sponsoring and publishing this book, which is to be used as a textbook for their courses on Shī'i studies. Last but certainly not least, I express my feelings of deep gratitude to God for all His favours that He has bestowed upon us in the past and in the present.

Mohammad A. Shomali
February 2003

ONE

Origins of Shī'ism

The Meaning of the Term Shī'a

Most languages have some terms that have two types of meanings: the original or primary and the technical or secondary. For example, the term *'ṣalāt'* in Arabic originally just meant to supplicate, *du'ā*. However, later on it acquired another meaning, i.e. a special type of worship in Islam that is known as *'namāz'* in Persian and many other languages. Of course, as one can see in this case, there must be links and similarities between these two types of meaning.

In his *Mu'jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah,* Aḥmad b. Fāris, a renowned philologist of the fifth Islamic century, examines the root of the term Shī'a, i.e. *sha-ya-'a*. He points out two meanings: to aid or help, and to spread. At least one of these two meanings must be found in all derivative forms of this root, whether they are used in their original sense or in their technical sense. For example, the Qur'ān (24:19) uses a derivative verb of this root to mean 'to spread'.

The term 'Shī'a' originally means one, two or a group of followers, in the sense that the followers of a given person are those who aid or help him or his causes. In the Glorious Qur'ān, this term

is used several times in this sense. For example, in the verse 28:15 God speaks of one of the followers of Moses as one of his Shī'a. Elsewhere, Abraham is introduced as a Shī'a of Noah. (37:83)

The Technical Meaning of 'Shī'a'

At the beginning of Islamic history, the term Shī'a was used in its original or general sense for followers of various people. For example, some ḥadīths speak of the '*Shī'a of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib*' and others of the '*Shī'a of Mu'awīyah b. Abī Sufyān.*' However, as we shall see later, the term gradually acquired a secondary or technical meaning, i.e. the followers of 'Ali, those who believed in his *Imāmate* (divinely appointed leadership).

In many Arabic dictionaries, the term 'Shī'a' is defined in both its literal and its technical meaning, such that it is easy to see the connection between the two, i.e. follower(s) in general and follower(s) of 'Ali. The same is true of many theological sources. For example, Abu al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 330 AH) in his well-known *Maqālat al-Islāmīyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn* comments on the technical meaning and says, 'They were called Shī'a only because they followed 'Ali and believed that he was more privileged than other companions of the Prophet'.[1]

Shahrestānī (d. 548 AH) in his *Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal,* an outstanding source concerning different sects in Islam, writes, 'Shī'a are those who followed 'Ali in particular and believed in his Imāmate and caliphate according to the explicit teachings and testament of the Prophet Muḥammad.'[2] This is a very accurate

1. Al-Ash'arī, 'Ali ibn Ismā'īl Abū al-Ḥasan, *Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī), p. 5 (p. 65 in Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd's edition).
2. Shahristānī, Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm (1414/1993), *Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* (continued...)

definition, since the Shī'a themselves believe that the reason for following 'Ali is that it was required by the Prophet, and it was not their personal decision to choose whom to follow. By contrast, the non-Shi'a, after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, followed the one who was chosen at *Saqīfah* and believed that the Prophet had left it to the people themselves to decide whom to follow. However, Abū Bakr b. Abī Quḥāfah, the first Caliph, who himself was chosen in this way, believed that he must appoint his own successor. The second Caliph, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, in turn appointed a council of six people to choose one from among their number according to a very strict procedure he himself had set up. It is interesting to note that it was 'Ali, the fourth Caliph, who was chosen and indeed compelled by nearly all Muslims after the murder of the third Caliph, 'Uthmān b. 'Affān, to undertake the position of caliphate.

In his *Firaq al-Shī'ah,* al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī (d. 313 AH), a well-known Shī'a scholar, writes, 'the Shī'a are the party of 'Ali b. Abī Ṭālib. They were called 'Shī'a of 'Ali' during and after the life of the Prophet and are known as the followers of 'Ali and believers in his Imāmate.'[1] Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413 AH), one of the most outstanding early Shī'a scholars, defines the Shī'a as being those who follow 'Ali and believe in his immediate successorship to the Prophet.[2] Explaining why the Shī'a are also called '*Imāmīyah*', he says: 'This is a title for those who believe in the necessity of Imāmate

(...continued)
(Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, third imprint), Vol. 1, p. 169.

1. Al-Nawbakhtī, al-Ḥasan ibn Mūsā (1404/1984), *Firaq al-Shī'ah* (Beirut: Dār al-Iḍwā'), p. 17.
2. See al-Mufīd, Shaykh Muḥammad b. M. b. Nu'mān, *Awā'il al-Maqālāt* (Qum: Kungereh-e Sheykh-e Mufīd, 1413), p. 36. [In this edition the main text starts on page 33.]

and its continuity in all ages, and that every *Imām* must be explicitly designated and must also be infallible and perfect."[1]

Thus, it can be said that the Shī'a are those who have the following beliefs about the successorship to the Prophet Muḥammad:

1. Successorship to the Prophet depends on divine appointment.

2. As the Prophet was chosen by God, his successor, the Imām, also must be chosen by God and identified by the Prophet.

3. The immediate successor to the Prophet Muḥammad was 'Ali.

Non-Shī'a or Sunni Muslims believe that the successorship to the Prophet is not a divine position, and accordingly those who succeeded the Prophet, the Caliphs, did not necessarily have to possess a high level of knowledge or spirituality; certainly they were not required to be the most knowledgeable and pious people of their age. In practice there have been some Caliphs whose acts did not even comply with Islamic standards. Neither were the shifts of power among Caliphs always morally acceptable.

What has been explained above is the most common usage of the term 'Shī'a' throughout the history of Islam. In some of the old texts one may come across a somewhat different usage of the term. For example, some historians and authors of biographical dictionaries of ḥadīth narrators applied the term 'Shī'a' even to those Sunni Muslims who believed that 'Ali was superior in knowledge or faith or services to Islam to the third Caliph or to all of the first three Caliphs.

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1. Ibid., p. 38.

When Did Shī'ism Start?

This is a question that naturally arises. The question can be divided into two sub-questions:

1. When was the first time that a group of people came to believe in the necessity of following 'Ali as a divinely chosen successor to the Prophet? In other words, when did the idea of Imāmate start?

2. When did the term 'Shī'a' acquire its technical meaning? In other words, when was the term 'Shī'a' first applied to the followers of 'Ali and believers in his Imāmate?

These questions are important, because it has been suggested that the Shī'a faith was not rooted in Islam during its formative period during the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, and that this idea originated only later among certain people or nations such as the Iranians. There have been many scholarly works on the evaluation of these hypotheses and many of them are no longer taken seriously in the academic world. In the present work, we shall investigate the main Islamic sources to see when the idea of Imāmate started and when the term 'Shī'a' was applied to the followers of 'Ali for the first time. Once we have elucidated the historical facts, there will be no need to study alternative theories one by one.

There are many ḥadīths narrated by both Shī'a and non-Shī'a regarding the issue of Imāmate, which we shall study later when we discuss Shī'a doctrines. In what follows, however, we shall study only those ḥadīths in which the Prophet Muḥammad spoke of a group of people as 'Shī'a' (followers) of 'Ali and then refer to some further ḥadīths and elements of the history of Islam that can shed

more light on the present subject. All ḥadīths mentioned below are cited from respected Sunni sources. They are only samples of what is to be found in the sources mentioned here as well as others.

1. Ibn 'Asākir (d. 571 AH) narrated from Jābir b. 'Abdullāh al-Anṣārī that he said:

   Once we were with the Prophet Muḥammad, when 'Ali arrived, upon which the Prophet said, 'I swear by Him Who has my life in His hand that surely this man and his *Shī'a* will be happy on the Day of Resurrection', and then the verse *'Surely those who believe and do good deeds are the best of men'* (98:7) was revealed. Later, whenever the companions of the Prophet Muḥammad saw 'Ali coming, they would say, 'The best of men has come.'[1]

2. Al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH) narrated from Ibn 'Abbās that when the verse (98:7) was revealed the Prophet told 'Ali: 'Those are you and your *Shī'a* and on the Day of Resurrection you will be pleased and well-pleasing [God].'[2]

3. Ibn Ḥajar (d. 974 AH) narrated from Ibn 'Abbās that when the verse (98:7) was revealed the Prophet told 'Ali: 'Those are you and your *Shī'a*. You and your *Shī'a* will come forth on the day of Resurrection while you will be pleased and well-pleasing [God] and your enemies will come while they will be angry and seized by their necks.'[3]

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1. Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Ibn 'Asākir*, Vol. 2, p. 442 and al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Vol. 8, p. 589.
2. Al-Suyūṭī, Ibid.
3. Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Sawā'iq al-Muḥriqah*, Section 11, Chapter 1. In the same book, Ibn Ḥajar has also narrated from Umm Salamah that one night when the Prophet was (continued...)

4. Ibn al-Athīr (d. 774) narrated that, addressing 'Ali, the Prophet said:

> 'O 'Ali! You and your *Shī'a* will reach God being pleased with Him and well-pleasing Him, and your enemies will reach Him, being angry and will be seized by their necks.' Then the Prophet demonstrated how this would be by putting his hand on his neck.[1]

There are other ḥadīths in which the Prophet Muḥammad, addressing 'Ali, used the expression '*our Shī'a*'. This is in line with what was asserted above, that the Shī'a are those who follow 'Ali, in accordance with the teachings of the Prophet and not because of their own personal decision. For example, Ibn 'Asākir narrated that the Prophet said:

> Surely there is a spring in Paradise sweeter than nectar, smoother than butter, cooler than ice, and which smells better than musk. In that spring is the clay (*ṭīnah*) from which we (my household and I) were created and *our Shī'a* are made from the same clay.[2]

There are yet other ḥadīths in which the Prophet, addressing 'Ali, used the expression 'Shī'a of your descendants'. This confirms what was suggested above, that the Shī'a are those who follow 'Ali because they believe in the institution of Imāmate. As we shall see in detail later, the Shī'a believe that 'Ali was the first Imām and after him

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(...continued)
in her house, his daughter Fāṭima arrived, with 'Ali following her. Then the Prophet said: 'O 'Ali! You and your companions are in Heaven. You and your Shī'a are in Paradise.'

1. Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Nihāyah*, the entry '*qa-ma-ḥa*'.
2. Ibn 'Asākir, Vol. 1, p. 131, no. 180.

Imāmate continued in the offspring of 'Ali and Fāṭima, who were chosen by God and introduced by the Prophet. For example, Zamakhsharī (d. 538 AH) in his *Rabī' al-Abrār* reports that the Prophet said: 'O 'Ali! When the Day of Resurrection comes I will hold on to God, you will hold on to me, your descendants will hold on to you and *their Shī'a* will hold on to them. Then you will see where we will be taken.'

It has to be noted that, according to the Qur'ān, prophethood was also inherited. The Qur'ān says: 'And surely we have sent Noah and Abraham, and we placed prophethood and the Book in their offspring.' (57:26) This means that those who were qualified to be chosen as prophets by God were included in their offspring. In the Qur'ān (2:124) there is an account of how Abraham who was already a prophet and *khalīl-ullāh* (God's friend) was elevated by God to be an Imām for the people. Then Abraham asked God whether He would place Imāmate in his offspring as well. God replied that His covenant (here meaning Imāmate) would not reach those who would be unjust. In this way, Abraham realized that Imāmate would be inherited by his just and pious offspring.

In addition to the above-mentioned ḥadīths and their like and ḥadiths on Imāmate that will be mentioned later, there are many other reasons why the appearance of a group of people such as the Shī'a in the lifetime of the Prophet was a very natural and even necessary phenomenon. For example, at the beginning of Islam when God asked the Prophet to start his public call to Islam by summoning his close relatives, the Prophet invited his relatives to a meal. After the meal the Prophet declared his mission and invited the guests to embrace Islam and said that whoever believed in Islam among them and assisted him would be his successor. All kept silent. The only one who accepted the invitation to assist him was

'Ali, a teenager at that time. The Prophet asked him to sit and repeated his invitation for a second and a third time. Again and again it was only 'Ali who expressed his readiness to support the Prophet. The Prophet accepted 'Ali's submission to the will of God and carried out Allah's command to designate him as his successor. This event is documented in many sources.[1]

In a very important statement, the Prophet clearly affirmed that 'Ali was truthful and free of false beliefs and wrong acts, be it in his personal conduct or in his speech and judgements, and implicitly asked Muslims to follow him. Umm Salamah reported that the Prophet said: 'Ali is always with the truth (*al-ḥaqq*) and the Qur'ān and the truth are always with him, and until the Day of Resurrection they will never separate from each other.' This particular ḥadīth is narrated by Ibn 'Abbās, Abū Bakr, 'Ā'ishah, Abū Sa'īd al-Khuddarī, Abū Laylā and Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī as well.[2] The Prophet is also quoted as saying, 'May God bless 'Ali. My Lord, make the truth always be with him."[3]

The Prophet also asserted on several occasions that 'Ali was the most knowledgeable among his men in matters pertaining to the Islamic sciences. For example, the Prophet said: 'Wisdom is divided into ten parts: nine parts are given to 'Ali and one part is distributed among the rest of the people.'[4] Later the second Caliph reaffirmed

1. Among non-Shī'a sources, one can refer to *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk* by Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH), Vol. 3, pp. 62, 63; *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh* by Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630 AH), Vol. 2, pp. 40, 41; and *Musnad of* Aḥmad b. Ḥanabal, *Musnad al-'Asharah al-Mubashsharīn bi al-Jannah*, Sakhr serial no. 841.
2. According to Ghafārī, p. 10, this tradition has been transmitted through 15 non-Shī'a channels, such as *Mustadark* by al-Ḥākim al-Nīshāburī, *al-Sawā'iq* by ibn Ḥajar, *Kanz al-'Ummāl* and *Yanābī' al-Mawaddah*.
3. See for example al-Tirmidhī, Kitāb al-Manāqib, Sakhr serial no. 3647.
4. *Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* by Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH), Vol. 7, p. 369.

the sayings of the Prophet by saying, 'May God never afflict me with a difficult task where 'Ali is not present."[1]

One also has to take into account the valuable and vital services and sacrifices of 'Ali, in order to be able to appreciate his position among Muslims. For example, when the infidels of Mecca planned to kill the Prophet and God informed him of their plot, the Prophet asked 'Ali whether he would be willing to sleep in his place so that the pagans would think that he was still at home, allowing him to leave Mecca safely. 'Ali accepted this task, at which the verse was revealed, 'And among people are those who sell their souls to acquire divine pleasure.' The migration of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. 'Ali served the cause of Islam by fighting in the Battles of Badr, Uḥud, Khaybar, Khandaq and Ḥunayn, in all of which he played crucial roles. These are all recorded in numerous historical works and collections of ḥadīths made by non-Shī'a scholars.

We conclude this part of the discussion by referring to the well-known ḥadīth of *Ghadīr*. Returning from his last pilgrimage to Mecca, the Prophet asked thousands of Muslims accompanying him to stop on the way. He stood on a platform or pulpit made for him out of saddles and said, 'Whoever has adopted me as his master (*mawlā*), 'Ali is now his master.' Then the people present there, including the future first and second Caliphs, paid allegiance to 'Ali and congratulated him. This ḥadīth is transmitted by more than one hundred sources. For a comprehensive list of non-Shī'a sources of this ḥadīth, see numerous volumes of *'Abaqāt al-Anwār* by Mīr Ḥāmid Ḥusayn al-Hindī (d. 1306 AH) and *Al-Ghadīr* by 'Abd al-Ḥusayn al-Amīnī (d. 1390 AH). Having affirmed the veracity of the ḥadīth, some Sunni writers have interpreted the term *mawlā* used in

1. See for example *Al-Iṣābah fī Tamīz al-aṣḥābah* by Ibn Ḥajar, Vol. 2, p. 509 and *Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* by Ibn Kathīr, Vol. 7, p. 59.

this ḥadīth to mean 'friendship.' Whether this can be accepted or not, there is no doubt that this tradition and the event gave 'Ali a unique and central position among the Companions of the Prophet.

Thus, it seems that the different sets of ḥadīths together with the historical evidence mentioned above should leave no doubt that during the lifetime of the Prophet many Muslims came to love 'Ali deeply, sought out his company and were determined to follow him after the Prophet. These people were so frequently and significantly referred to as the Shī'a of 'Ali that gradually the term 'Shī'a' alone became equivalent to the Shī'a of 'Ali. More importantly, the idea of Imāmate of 'Ali certainly started in the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad. The demise of the Prophet naturally brought the issue into focus and made those who still believed in the necessity of following 'Ali distinct from other Muslims, who sooner or later came to believe in the institution of Caliphate as providing successorship to the Prophet in ruling Islamic society and not as a divine position. Describing events after the death of the prophet, Al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345 AH), a great Sunni historian, writes: 'Surely Imām 'Ali and those of his *Shī'a* who were with him stayed in his house at the time that the allegiance to Abū Bakr was made."[1]

Later events, such as the wars that occurred during the Caliphate of 'Ali and the tragedy of *Karbalā* in which the third Imām of the Shī'a and 72 of his family and companions were killed, lent greater prominence to the Shī'a of 'Ali and influenced the formation of Shī'a identity. For example, we find in one of the early works that 'Ali, condemning Ṭalḥah and Zubayr, said: 'Surely the followers of Ṭalḥah and Zubayr in Basra killed my *Shī'a* and my agents."[2] Abū Mikhnaf (d. 158 AH) reports that after the death of Mu'āwīyah the *Shī'a* gathered at the house of Sulaymān b. Ṣurad and he told them:

1. *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyah*, p. 121.
2. *Waq'at Ṣiffīn* by Nasr b. Muzāḥim (d. 212 AH).

'Mu'āwīyah has died; Ḥusayn has refused to pay allegiance to the Umayyads and has departed for Mecca; and you are his *Shī'a* and the *Shī'a* of his father."[1]

There is an interesting remark made by Abū Ḥātam al-Sijistānī (d. 322 AH) in his *Al-Zīnah*: 'The term "Shī'a" was the first name that appeared in Islam for a denomination (*madhhab*) and it was the title for four companions of the Prophet: Abū Dharr, 'Ammār, Miqdād and Salmān al-Fārsī. These four were also the most outstanding followers of 'Ali.' He also adds: 'Later, at the time of the Battle of Ṣiffīn the term was applied to [all] followers of 'Ali."[2]

The Early Shī'a

Naturally enough, Shī'a Islam first started in the Ḥijāz among the companions of the Prophet. Referring to the Islamic historical and biographical works, we see that the list of the Shī'a among the companions of the Prophet includes the following well-known members of the *Banī Hāshim* (descendants of Hāshim, great-grandfather of the Prophet Muḥammad): 'Abdullāh b. al-'Abbās, al-Faḍl b. al-'Abbās, 'Ubaydullāh b. al-'Abbās, Quthām b. al-'Abbās, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-'Abbās, Tamām b. al-'Abbās, Aqīl b. Abī Ṭālib, Abū Sufyān b. al-Ḥārith b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, Nawfil b. al-Ḥārith, 'Abdullāh b. Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib, 'Awn b. Ja'far, Muḥammad b. Ja'far, Rabī'at b. al-Ḥārith b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, al-Ṭufayl b. al-Ḥārith, al-Mughayrat b. Nawfil b. al-Ḥārith, 'Abdullāh b. al-Ḥārith b. Nawfil, 'Abdullāh b. Abī Sufyān b. al-Ḥārith, al-'Abbās b. Rabī'at b. al-Ḥārith, al-'Abbās b. 'Utbat b. Abī Lahab, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib b. Rabī'at

1. *Maqtal al-Imām al-Ḥusayn* by Abū Mikhnaf, p. 15.
2. Abū Ḥātam al-Sijistanī, Vol. 3, p. 10, Part Three: 'Terms Popular among the People of Knowledge'.

b. al-Ḥārith, Ja'far b. Abī Sufyān b. al-Ḥārith. The list of Shī'a among those companions of the Prophet who were not from the Banī Hāshim includes: Salmān, Miqdād, Abū Dharr, 'Ammār b. Yāsir, Ḥudhayfat b. al-Yamān, Khuzaymat b. Thabit, Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, Abu al-Haytham Mālik b. al-Ṭiḥān, Ubayy b. Ka'b, Qays b. Sa'd b. 'Ubādah, 'Adīy b. Ḥatam, 'Ubādat b. al-Āmit, Bilāl al-Ḥabashī, Abū Rāfi', Hāshim b. 'Utbah, 'Uthmān b. Ḥunayf, Sahl b. Ḥunayf, Ḥakīm b. Jiblat al-'Abdi, Khālid b. Sa'īd b. al-'Ās, B. al-Ḥusayb al-Aslamī, Hind b. Abī Hālat al-Tamīmī, Ja'dat b. Hubayrah, Ḥujr b. 'Adīy al-Kindī, 'Amr b. al-Ḥamiq al-Khuzā'ī, Jābir b. 'Abdullāh al-Anṣārī, Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr (the son of the first Caliph), Abān b. Sa'īd b. al-'Asī, Zayd b. Ṣawḥān al-Zaydī.[1]

From the Ḥijāz, Shī'a Islam first spread to *Bilād al-Shām* (approximately present-day Syria and Lebanon), especially *Jabal 'Āmil*. The reason for this was that 'Uthmān b. 'Affān, the third Caliph, exiled the Prophet's companion Abū Dharr to Damascus where Mu'āwīyah was ruling. Abū Dharr did not keep silent, and went around Damascus and elsewhere in the region protesting against the deviations that had appeared in the Islamic world and summoning people to the love and support of 'Ali. This great Companion of the Prophet went to Jabal 'Āmil in southern Lebanon where he built two mosques and preached Shī'i Islam. Shī'i Islam was strengthened in Syria especially during the rule of the

1. See for example *Buḥūth fī al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* by J. Subḥānī, Vol. 6, pp. 109 and 110. Sayyīd 'Ali al-Madanī (d. 1120 AH) in his *Al-Darajāt al-Rafī'at fī Ṭabaqāt al-Shī'ah al-Imāmīyah* mentions names of 69 Companions of the Prophet who were Shī'a. Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Din (1377 AH) in his *Al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah fī Ta'līf al-Ummah* mentions names of more than two hundred Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad who were Shī'a, in alphabetical order starting with Abū Rāfi' and ending with Yazīd b. Ḥawtharah al-Anṣārī. Yusuf b. 'Abdullāh (d. 456) in his *Al-Istī'āb*, Ibn al-Athir in his *Usd al-Ghābah* and Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852 AH) in his *Al-Iṣābah* are some of the non-Shī'a scholars who have mentioned some of the Shī'a pioneers.

Hamdānid dynasty, particularly during the reign of Sayf al-Dawlah. The people of Ba'albak (an ancient city in Lebanon, near the Syrian border) have also been Shī'a from the very beginning of the history of Shī'ism in Bilād al-Shām. Today it is one of the important centres of Shī'a population in the region.

During the Caliphate of 'Ali and after the Battle of Jamal, the city of Kufa in Iraq, originally founded for military purposes, became the capital of the Islamic state and of Shī'ism as well.[1] Shī'ism developed and flourished in Kufa and from there spread to other parts of the world.

In Yemen, Shī'ism is associated with the circumstances under which the people there embraced Islam. According to the history books, the Prophet first sent Khālid b. al-Walīd to Yemen to invite people to Islam. He stayed there for six months, but had no success. Then the Prophet sent 'Ali and asked him to send Khālid back. Al-Burā', who was a member of the delegation led by 'Ali, says that when they reached the nearest part of Yemen, 'Ali led the morning prayer and asked everyone to stand in one row. Then he advanced further towards the local people. 'Ali first praised God, and then read the message of the Prophet to them. All the people of Hamdān embraced Islam on the very first day and were then followed by the other people of Yemen.[2] Therefore, the Muslims of Yemen grew to have a great love for 'Ali, especially later when they heard the merits of 'Ali from the Prophet and witnessed the brutality of the enemies of 'Ali, such as Busr b. Arti'ah.

Shī'i Islam in Egypt has a similar story, for from the first entrance of Islam into their country the Egyptians knew of Shī'ism through contacts with great Companions of the Prophet who were

1. In 661 CE the capital was transferred to Damascus by Mu'āwīyah b. Abī Sufyān.
2. See *Al-Kāmil* by Ibn al-Athīr, Vol. 2, p. 300. See also *Kanz al-'Ummāl* by al-Muttaqī al-Hindī (d. 975 AH), Vol. 6, pp. 158 and 392.

involved in the event, such as Miqdād, Abū Dharr, Abū Rāfi' and Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī. During the time of the third Caliph, 'Ammār b. Yāsir, a great Companion of the Prophet and an outstanding Shī'a personality, visited Egypt. The Egyptians were very active in the events that compelled 'Ali to accept the Caliphate after the murder of the third Caliph. When 'Ali sent Qays b. Sa'd to govern Egypt he was warmly welcomed and the people paid allegiance to him. Later 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ killed Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, who had been appointed by 'Ali as the next governor of Egypt. Under the Umayyad and 'Abbāsid caliphates there was no Shī'a rule in the country, but the people were sympathetic to the Shī'i cause. This facilitated the establishment of Fatimid rule in Egypt and much of North Africa, which lasted until the time of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī who restored Sunni dominance of the region.[1]

In Iran, Shī'ism had a different story. When they began to embrace Islam from the time of the second Caliph onwards, the majority of Iranians became Sunnis. Of course, for particular reasons some cities were from the very beginning Shī'a in whole or in part, such as Qum, Rayy and Kāshān. The Buwayhids (ruled 320–447 AH), who were Shī'a, had a great influence in the provinces of Iran and also in the capital of the Caliphate in Baghdad, and even upon the Caliph himself. This gave the Shī'a the strength to practise and propagate their faith openly. When King Muḥammad Khudābandeh became Shī'a in the seventh Islamic century, he gave greater prestige to the Shī'a of Iran. A number of movements such as that of the Sarbedārids of Khurāsān also tended to popularize Shī'ism. Finally, King Ismā'īl established Safavid rule in 905 AH and

1. It has to be noted that the Fatimids were 'Isma'ilites' and not 'Twelvers' and during their rule the majority of the people remained Sunni. The Twelvers are by far the largest group of Shī'a Islam. The Twelvers believe in the twelve Imāms. The Ismailites are the second largest group of Shī'a Islam. They believe in the first six Imāms of the Twelvers.

made Shī'ism the dominant school of thought in Iran. Since then, the overwhelming majority of Iranians have always been Shī'a.

The growth of Shī'i Islam in another country with a Shī'a majority, the Republic of Azerbaijan, followed a similar course to Iran, since it used to be part of Iran until it was conquered by the Russians early in the 19th century.[1] Islam entered Azerbaijan in the first Islamic century (642 CE) and since then Islam has always been the dominant religion there. Muslims now constitute more than 95 per cent of the population and the rest follow mostly the Russian Orthodox Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church. Seventy per cent of the whole population are Shī'a. The process by which Shī'ism became the dominant faith in Azerbaijan goes back to the early 16th century during the rule of the King Ismā'īl, the founder of the Safavid dynasty.

Although the practice of Islam was restricted under Soviet rule, some of the people of Azerbaijan remained actively involved in religious affairs. There are many mosques, such as the Mosque of Tāzeh Pīr, the Jum'ah Mosque and the Mosque of Imām Ḥusayn. There are also Islamic schools and seminaries, especially in Baku and Jalīl Ābād. It is customary for people to visit the tombs of Islamic saints, such as the tombs of the sisters of Imām Riḍā in Nādarān, the tomb of Bībī Heybat near Baku and the tomb attributed to the Prophet Jerjīs in Biljan. The people of Azerbaijan actively celebrate Islamic occasions. Every year in the month of *Muḥarram* (the first month in the Islamic calendar), especially on the 10th (Day of *Āshūrā'*) many processions and mourning ceremonies take place all around the country.

1. Azerbaijan remained under Russian rule until independence in 1918. Then it was conquered by the Bolsheviks in April 1920. The Republic of Azerbaijan was proclaimed on August 30, 1991.

TWO

Sources of Shī'i Thought

Before studying Shī'a doctrines or practices, it is necessary to identify the sources on which the Shī'a rely for understanding Islam and the methodology they adopt in using those sources. In what follows, we will study the four sources of Shī'i thought as they relate to jurisprudence in particular: the Glorious Qur'ān, the Sunnah, reason and consensus.

The Glorious Qur'ān

The Qur'ān is, of course, the most important source for all Muslims, including the Shī'a. The Qur'ān therefore acts as an instrument of unity among all Muslims. Regardless of their different sectarian and cultural backgrounds, all Muslims refer to the same book as the divine guide to govern their life. As at any other time in history, today throughout the Muslim world there exists only one Qur'ān without any addition or alterations. A typical Shī'a standpoint towards the Qur'ān can be found in the following passage:

> We believe that the Qur'ān was divinely inspired, and revealed by Allah on the tongue of His honourable Prophet, making clear everything, an everlasting miracle. Man is unable to write anything like it because of its eloquence, clarity, truth and knowledge, and no alteration can be made to it. The Qur'ān we have now is exactly what was sent to the Prophet, and anyone who claims otherwise is an evildoer, a mere sophist or else a person in error, and all of them have gone astray, because it is the speech of Allah, and 'Falsehood cannot come at it from before it or from behind.' (41:42)
>
> ... We also believe that we must respect and give dignity to the Glorious Qur'ān, and this both in word and in deed. Therefore, it must not be defiled intentionally, not even one of its letters, and it must not be touched by one who is not *ṭāhir* [pure]. It is said in the Qur'ān that 'None can touch it save the purified.' (56:79) (Muzaffar, p. 26)

Shī'a Deny Any Alteration in the Qur'ān

As mentioned above, the Shī'a deny any alteration in the Qur'ān and believe that the Qur'ān available today is the same one as was revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad. The Qur'ān is complete. However, some people who were not familiar with Shī'i Islam and had no close contact with Shī'a communities claimed that the Shī'a believe that the Qur'ān had been altered and some parts of it had been deleted. The basis for this accusation can be nothing more than the existence of some ḥadīths in Shī'a collections that have been taken to suggest the occurrence of alteration in the Qur'ān. Neither the overwhelming majority of reputable Shī'a scholars nor of ordinary believers have ever held such a belief. Indeed, this charge

is so odd that it does not deserve to be taken seriously and, when it is made, it is usually done for polemical and hostile purposes.

No one has ever seen a copy of the Qur'ān different from the standard one in any part of the Islamic world. There are manuscripts of the Qur'ān available today that go back to the time of Shī'a Imāms and they are exactly the same as the current ones. In addition to the copies kept in the museums of Iran, Pakistan, Iraq and other parts of the world, copies of great historical value kept in the Museum of the *Qur'ān* in the city of Mashhad are particularly noteworthy.[1]

The Glorious Qur'ān explicitly says that God Himself preserves the Qur'ān from alteration and textual mutilation:

> Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its preserver. (15:9)[2]

Regarding this verse, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī in his renowned *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, one of the greatest commentaries on the Qur'ān, states:

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1. Muḥammad Bāqir Anṣārī, an expert in the field of the Qur'ānic sciences, writes: 'I have personally seen some copies of the Holy Qur'ān written on parchment made of deerskin. The period of writing of these copies of Qur'ān goes back more than a thousand years. Some of them are attributed to Imām 'Ali (A), Imām al-Sajjād (the fourth Imām), other Imāms, Shi'ah 'Ulamā and pious men. Similarly, in other museums and libraries, there are also copies of the Qur'ān that are very ancient, but so far no one has been able to claim that even a single word of these manuscripts of the *Qur'ān* differs from what is now available to the Shī'ah and to the Muslims of the world.'
2. It has to be noted that the charge of alteration is limited to deletion of some verses; otherwise neither Shī'ites nor Sunnites have ever been charged with adding to the Qur'ān.

> [T]he *Qur'ān* is a living and eternal Reminder, which will never die and fall into oblivion. It is immune from any addition and loss. It is immune from and secure against any alterations in form and style that could affect its character and role, that is, as 'the Reminder of Allah which expresses divine truth and knowledge'. For this reason, the aforesaid verse indicates that the Divine Book has always been and will continue to be guarded against any mutilation and alteration.

In what follows, we will study some of the statements of Shī'a scholars in different ages regarding this matter. And since the reason for charging the Shī'a with a belief that the Qur'ān has been altered is the existence of few ḥadīths in some Shī'a books that have been taken to suggest alteration, we will also refer to aspects of Shī'a methodology in ḥadīth studies in order to understand the Shī'i approach to ḥadīths in general and the ḥadīths at issue in particular. It has to be noted that similar or even stronger ḥadīths exist in non-Shī'a sources. However, the Shī'a have never accused their Sunni brothers of believing in the alteration of the Qur'ān, since when attributing certain beliefs to any group one has to refer to the statements made by one's own authorities, and not to isolated statements that they themselves do not accept or interpret in a way different from what outsiders may claim.

Statements of Shī'a Scholars About the Qur'ān

The best way to understand Shī'a views concerning the Qur'ān is to refer to the statements of their great scholars. Examples now follow.

1. Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381), known as '*Shaykh al-muḥaddithīn*' (the master of traditionists), in his *al-I'tiqādāt al-Imāmīyah* (*Shī'ite Creed*) says:

   Our belief is that the Qur'ān that Allah revealed to His Prophet Muḥammad is [the same as] the one between the two covers (*daffatayn*). And it is the one that is in the hands of the people, and is not greater in extent than that. The number of chapters as generally accepted is one hundred and fourteen ... And he who asserts that we say that it is greater in extent than that, is a liar.[1]

2. Sayyid al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044) states:

   Knowledge and certainty about the validity of the narration of the Holy Qur'ān are like knowledge and certainty about the existence of countries, cities, famous historical events ... This is because the specific regard for and attention given to the Holy Qur'ān and the strong motive for recording and guarding its text were much stronger than the care and attention given to the above-cited items ... During the time of the Messenger of Allah (S), the Holy Qur'ān had been a compiled collection exactly as it is now. The Holy Prophet (S) had even charged a group of his Companions with the responsibility of memorizing and safeguarding the Holy Qur'ān. At that time, it was customary for the people to recite the Holy Qur'ān before the Holy Prophet (S) to ensure the accuracy of the text. The Holy Prophet (S), too, listened to their recitation. A group of the Companions, such as 'Abdullāh b. Mas'ūd, Ubayy b. Ka'b and others, read the whole

1. *Shi'ite Creed,* English version, p. 77.

text of the Holy Qur'ān several times in the presence of the Holy Prophet (S).

With a little attention, one comes to realize that all these matters indicate that the Holy Qur'ān has been a compiled collection. No one takes into account the opponents of this belief, be they from *Imāmīyah* or *Ḥashwīyah*, for their view is derived from a group of the people of ḥadīth who narrated weak ḥadīth on the subject, thinking that they had related reliable and valid ḥadīth. However, such weak ḥadīths have no power to challenge something based on definitive knowledge and certainty.[1]

3. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), known as *Shaykh al-Tā'ifah*, the master of Shī'a sect, states:

The remarks about addition and loss in the Qur'ānic text are not noteworthy; there is a consensus among the 'Ulamā regarding the invalidity of this matter.

4. Shaykh al-Ṭabarsī (d. 548/1153 or 538/1143?) in his renowned Qur'ānic Exegesis, *Majma' al-Bayān*, says:

There is a consensus and unanimity among the Muslims that no additions have been made to the Holy Qur'ān. But with regard to omissions from the text of the Holy Qur'ān, a group of Imāmīyah and a group of Ḥashwīyah (who are Sunnis) have said that there are alterations and deficiencies in the Holy Qur'ān, but the true belief accepted by the Imāmīyah holds otherwise.

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1. *Reply to the Questions of Ṭirāblusīyāt.*

5. Sayyid b. Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1265) in his *Sa'd al-Su'ūd* says:

> In truth, the Imāmīyah believe in the absence of alteration to the Holy Qur'ān.[1]

Shī'a Ḥadīths About the Qur'ān

Here we refer only to aspects of Shī'a methodology in ḥadīth studies that bear on the subject at hand and ones similar to it. First of all it should be made clear that no collection of ḥadīth is regarded by the Shī'a to be authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) in its entirety. However great, valuable and generally accurate a collection of ḥadīth may be, Shī'a scholars do not automatically assume its contents to be authentic. Every single ḥadīth mentioned in any collection of ḥadīth has to be investigated separately. To be able to use a given ḥadīth as his reference, a Shī'a scholar needs first to consider at least three issues:

1. The means through which he has received the book containing that ḥadīth. For example, if a ḥadīth is mentioned in *Al-Kāfī*, which was written in the fourth century, the researcher has to make sure that the copy of *Al-Kāfī* that he has is identical to the author's copy. For this purpose Shī'a scholars of ḥadīth

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1. Cited in Anṣārī (1997). For further statements, refer to *Al-Ṣāfī* by Mullā Muḥsin al-Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680), *Risālah fī Ithbāt 'Adam al-Taḥrīf* (a treatise on absence of alteration in the Qur'ān) by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Hurr al-'Āmilī (d. 1104/1692), *Fawā'id al-'Uṣūl* by Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī (d. 1212/1797), known as Baḥr al-'Ulūm, *Kashf al-Ghiṭā' 'An Mubhamāt al-Sharī'at al-Gharrā'* by Shaykh Ja'far (d. 1228/1813), known as Kāshif al-Ghiṭā', *Tanqīḥ al-Maqāl* by Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥasan al- Mamaqānī (d. 1323/1905), *Ālā' al-Raḥmān* by Muḥammad Jawād al-Balāghī (d.1352/1933), *Ajwibat Masā'il Mūsā Jār-ullāh* by Sayyīd 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn (d. 1377/1957), *Al-Mīzān* by 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1402), *Al-Bayān* by Ayatollah Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim al-Khū'ī (d. 1413), *Ma'ālim al-Madrisatayn* by Sayyid Murtaḍā 'Askarī and *Tahdhīb al-Uṣūl* by Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989 CE).

generation after generation checked their copies of those books with their masters, ḥadīth by ḥadīth, and having completed this task they would get permission from their masters to narrate from the author of the original book.

2. Having made sure that the book he has in his hands is identical to the original book, a scholar needs to investigate the chain of narrators through which he has received the saying from the Prophet or the Imāms. For this purpose, he has to make sure that nothing is missing in the chain of narrators, that all the people occurring in the chain are accurately identified and finally that all those identified as narrators are trustworthy and reliable. If only one person, say, out of ten is missing, is unknown or is known to be a liar, the whole chain becomes invalid.

3 When the first two tasks are completed, the scholar of ḥadīth must next make several general investigations about the content of the ḥadīth to enable him to use that ḥadīth as his reference. The first is to check whether the ḥadīth is compatible with the Qur'ān or not. Without any doubt, all Shī'a agree that whatever ḥadīth contradicts the Qur'ān or is against Qur'ānic teachings has to be rejected, even if all the narrators happen to be trustworthy. There are very clear instructions from the Imāms of the Household of the Prophet in this regard. For example, Ibn Abī Ya'fūr says:

> I asked Abū Abdillāh (Imām Ṣādiq) about the different traditions narrated by those whom we trust and also by those whom we don't. Hearing this, the Imām replied: 'Whenever you receive a tradition which is borne out by any verse from

> the Book of God or by an [established] saying of the Prophet, then accept it. Otherwise, the tradition is to be left only for the one who has brought it to you."[1]

No one can say that, because so-and-so was a very great scholar, anything that is mentioned in his book is correct. Therefore, the Shī'a do not believe in any *Ṣaḥīḥ* (all-authentic) collection of ḥadīth, in contrast to the belief of the Sunnis concerning the collections of Bukhārī and Muslim. Despite their unquestioned high status for all Shī'a scholars, the Four Books of ḥadīth (*al-Kutub al-Arba'ah*), i.e. *Al-Kāfī*, *Man lā Yaḥḍuruhū al-Faqīh*, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* and *Al-Istibṣār*, are not regarded either by their compilers or by other scholars as authentic in their entirety.[2] For the Shī'a, the Qur'ān is the only all-authentic book, with which every other source has to be in accordance. This very point is mentioned in the preface to *Uṣūl al-Kāfī* by Shaykh al-Kulaynī himself:

> Brother, may Allah lead you to the right path. You should know that it is not for anyone to distinguish the truth in the conflicting narrations attributed to the 'Ulamā [i.e. Imāms], peace be upon them, except through the standards that have been declared by al-'Ālim [i.e. the Imām], peace be upon him: 'Test the [conflicting] traditions by the Book of Allah, and that which agrees with it, take it, and that which disagrees with it, reject it.'

1. *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, Arabic–English version, Tradition no. 202.
2. For example, Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, a great scholar of ḥadīth, in his *Mir'āt al-'Uqūl* evaluates all ḥadīths of *Al-Kāfī* one by one and states his own views regarding their authenticity and their contents.

By contrast, Sunni Muslims believe that there are six *Ṣaḥīḥs* (*al-Siḥāḥ al-Sittah*), which are believed to be all-authentic collections of ḥadīths.

Muṣḥaf of Fāṭima

Another subject that is sometimes misunderstood is the subject of the *Muṣḥaf* of Fāṭima, the daughter of the Prophet. According to some Shī'a traditions, there is a book bearing this name, kept by the Imāms of the Household of the Prophet. In Arabic, the term *Muṣḥaf* means 'book' or 'collection of pages,' being derived from *ṣafḥah* meaning 'page'. Similar words are *ṣuḥuf* (like the *ṣuḥuf* of Abraham and Moses, referred to in the Qur'ān to mean the books they received) and *ṣaḥīfah*, 'newspaper' in modern Arabic. Thus, *Muṣḥaf* does not necessarily mean the Qur'ān: the word can be applied both to the Qur'ān and to other books. Some people have thought that since the Shī'a have ḥadīths about the *Muṣḥaf* of Fāṭima, they believe in another Qur'ān. This misunderstanding is perhaps caused by lack of knowledge of Arabic and Shī'a traditions.

The *Muṣḥaf* of Fāṭima is also not something that attempts to rival the Holy Qur'ān. There is a tradition from Imām Ṣādiq, which says that the *Muṣḥaf* of Fāṭima includes information about future events and contains a list of names of those people who will rule in the future, including the Umayyads, the Abbasids and so on. There is nothing of the Qur'ān in it. Neither is there anything related to the practical laws of Islam.[1]

According to some traditions, when the Prophet died, Fāṭima was very sad, so the archangel Gabriel used to go and talk to her about future events in order to console her. The information he conveyed

1. See *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, nos 636 and 637.

to her was then put together in the form of a book and became known as the *Muṣḥaf* of Fāṭima.

Aware that there is no ground for accusing the Shī'a of having another Qur'ān, some people adopt the tactic of attacking them by saying that the Shī'a believe that Fāṭima was a messenger of God. However, as we have just seen, the *Muṣḥaf* of Fāṭima has nothing to do with prophethood. According to a ḥadīth from Imām Ṣādiq found in *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, Fāṭima died 75 days after the demise of the Prophet. She was very sad because of the death of her father, so Gabriel used to come and express his condolences to Fāṭima and speak about the place of the Prophet in Paradise to make Fāṭima rejoice. Gabriel also explained to Fāṭima what would happen to her children. Imām 'Ali wrote all this down in a collection that later became known as the *Muṣḥaf* of Fāṭima. It was not a matter of prophethood. All Shī'a believe that the Prophet Muḥammad was the last prophet, but this does not mean that God could not communicate anything to anyone after his death. According to the Qur'ān, it is quite clear that divine inspiration or communication comes in different forms, some being exclusive to the Prophets and others not. For example, the mother of Moses was inspired by some kind of communication, though there is no claim that she was a prophet. In fact, God may even inspire non-humans, such as the bees:

> Your Lord has revealed to the bees to select a place for living from the mountains. (16:68)

This kind of guidance and inspiration is called *waḥy*, but it was not a matter of prophethood. So the term *waḥy* generally means 'inspiration', whether exclusive to the prophets or more generally.

Fāṭima's access to heavenly information does not therefore mean that she was a prophet. It was an indication of her purity and an endorsement of the great love that the Prophet Muḥammad had shown her. It confirms that whatever the Prophet said about her was correct, for he said: 'Fāṭima is part of me. What angers her angers me."

The Sunnah

After the Glorious Qur'ān, the most important source for understanding Islam and therefore Shī'i thought is the Sunnah of the Prophet Muḥammad, including his sayings, his deeds and his tacit approval of what was conducted in his presence. The Qur'ān itself clearly gives such a high position to the Prophet, as he is referred to as the one who is responsible for explaining the Qur'ān (16:44) and teaching the Qur'ān and wisdom (62:2). The Prophet is a perfect example for believers (33:21). He never speaks of his own wishes (53:3). Muslims are asked to hold on to whatever he gives them and refrain from whatever he prohibits.

Awareness of the above verses and many others relating to the status of the Prophet, together with consciousness of his having been a messenger chosen directly by God and addressed by Him, induced in the Shī'a, together with other Muslims, sincere love for and devotion to the Prophet Muḥammad.

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1. *Ṣaḥīḥ of* Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Manāqib, Sakhr serial nos 3437 and 3483; *Saḥīḥ of* Muslim, Kitāb Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥābah, Sakhr serial no. 4483; *Musnad* of Ahmad, Musnad al-Madanīyīn, Int. serial no. 15539 and *Sunan of* al-Tirmidhī, Kitāb al-Manāqib, Sakhr serial no. 3802.

Compilation of Ḥadīths

During the Life of the Prophet

From the very beginning Muslims started writing down traditions of the Seal of the Prophets and transmitting them to those who had not been present when the utterances were made. Collections of Prophetic narrations, known as *Ṣaḥīfah*, were made by people such as 'Abdullāh b. 'Amr b. al-'Ās, Samarah b. Jundab, Sa'd b. 'Ubādah and Jābir b. 'Abdullāh al-Anṣārī. According to a well-known ḥadīth, 'Abdullāh b. 'Amr b. al-'Ās used to write down whatever he heard from the Prophet, but then he was prohibited from doing so by the Quraysh. They argued that the Prophet was a human being who speaks when he is angry and when he is happy (meaning that his statements might be influenced by emotion and not fully intentional). 'Abdullāh therefore stopped writing down ḥadīths until he spoke to the Prophet about what had happened. Then the Prophet pointed to his mouth and said: 'Do write! I swear by Him who has my life in His hand that nothing other than the truth has ever come out of it.'[1] Imām Ahmad narrates from Abū Hurayrah that the Prophet Muḥammad told his Companions to write his ḥadīth for a person called 'Abū Shāt'.[2] Then Imām Ahmad cites Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān to have said that no ḥadīth stronger than this has been narrated to demonstrate the importance of writing down ḥadīths, since it contains an order from the Prophet himself.

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1. *Sunan* of al- Dārimī, Kitāb al-Muqaddamah, Sakhr serial nos 484–486 and *Sunan of* Abū Dāwūd, Kitāb al-'Ilm, Sakhr serial no. 3161. Other sources have confirmed that he wrote ḥadīths. See for example, *Ṣaḥīḥ of* Bukharī, Kitāb al-'Ilm, Sakhr serial no. 110, *Musnad of* Ahmad, Bāqī Musnad al-Mukthirīn, Sakhr serial no. 8863 and *Sunan of* al-Tirmidhī, Kitāb al-'Ilm, Sakhr serial no. 8863.
2. This ḥadīth is also narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥ of* Bukhārī, Kitāb al-'Ilm, Sakhr serial no. 109, Kitāb al-Luqaṭah, no. 2254 and Kitāb al-Dīyāt, no. 6372.

This episode shows that some people were not happy with the recording of ḥadīths because they failed to appreciate properly the status of the Prophet Muḥammad. However, Muslims did not listen to their opinions and continued to write down ḥadīths.[1]

During the Time of the First Caliph

A famous Sunni scholar, Dhahabī, in his book *Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāẓ* (A Memorial of the Memorizers), reports that Abū Bakr gathered the people and said: 'O people! O Companions of the Prophet! You report something from the Prophet, although there is no agreement among you. It is better therefore not to narrate the traditions of the Prophet any more, and if someone asks you about the views of the Prophet in respect of some matters, simply reply that we have the Book of Allah and it is enough for us. It is sufficient: whatever is permitted in the Qur'ān is permitted (*ḥalāl*) and whatever is forbidden in the Qur'ān is forbidden (*ḥarām*). Do not go any further. Do not say anything about the views of the Prophet and his traditions.'[2]

During the Time of the Second Caliph

At this time even more severe decisions were taken against those who wanted to narrate traditions of the Prophet. For example, in a striking story, one of the companions of the Prophet, Qaraẓah b. Ka'b, says that the second Caliph sent a group of the Anṣār to Kufa

1. There are different sets of ḥadīths in major Sunni collections of ḥadīth indicating the necessity of transmitting ḥadīths to those who do not know. In fact, this is a clear instance of a more general Islamic duty of spreading knowledge and teaching those who do not know. Denial of necessity of registering and transmitting ḥadīths leads to denial of the truth and the necessity of Sunnah and the guidance of the Prophet in the first place.
2. *Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāẓ* by Dhahabī, Vol. 1, pp. 2–3.

and asked him to accompany them.[1] The Caliph himself escorted them as far as a place outside Medina called Sirā' and asked them: 'Do you know why I escorted you and came with you this distance?' Qaraẓah says that they replied: 'Because you wanted to show your respect for Anṣār.' The second Caliph affirmed that, but added that he had something more to say. He said: 'You are going to a people whose tongues move with [the recitation of the] Qur'ān like date trees [moving with winds]. When you reach there people will say: "The Companions of Muḥammad have come. The Companions of Muḥammad have come." They will ask you to narrate ḥadīths. Beware, do not hinder them with ḥadīths of the Prophet and I am your partner (*sharīk*).' Thus the second Caliph asked them not to mention ḥadīths, said that he would support them in this and affirmed that he had adopted the same policy himself

As the second Caliph predicted, when the delegation arrived in Kufa people asked them to narrate ḥadīths of the Prophet, because they like other Muslims had a sincere love of the Prophet and wanted to know and to hear something from the Prophet. They wanted to benefit from the example of the Prophet and his explanation of the Qur'ān. However, Qaraẓah says: 'I did not mention any ḥadīths.'[2]

Al-Dārimī reports in his *Sunan* from Sha'bī that he accompanied Abdullāh b. 'Umar (the son of the second Caliph) for a whole year and he did not hear any tradition of the Prophet from him.[3] Al-Dārimī also narrates that this continued for a longer period, that is,

1. Anṣār is the title for those Muslims who lived in the city of Yathrib (later called Medina) before Islam and welcomed the Prophet and those who emigrated after him from Mecca to Medina who were in turn called *Muhājirūn*.
2. *Sunan* of al-Dārimī, Kitāb al-Muqaddimah, Sakhr serial nos 281 and 282 and *Sunan* of Ibn Mājah, Kitāb al-Muqaddamah, Sakhr serial no. 28.
3. *Sunan* of al-Dārimī, Kitāb al-Muqaddimah, Sakhr serial no. 275 and *Sunan* of Ibn Mājah, Kitāb al-Muqaddamah, Sakhr serial no. 26.

for two and half years, and that he heard just one ḥadīth from 'Abdullāh.' He also narrates from Sa'd b. Yazīd that he was with Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ on his journey to Mecca, during his stay in Mecca and on his return journey to Medina, but he did not hear any tradition of the Prophet from him. Still more striking events happened at this time. For example, Dhahabī reports in *Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāẓ* that three great companions of the Prophet were imprisoned for narrating Prophetic traditions. One of them was Ibn Mas'ūd, a well-known scribe (*kātib*) and reciter of the Qur'ān, who had embraced Islam very early and been tortured by the pagans of Quraysh.[2]

During the Time of the Third Caliph

The discouraging of ḥadīth narration remained in effect. Interestingly enough, the third Caliph, 'Uthmān b. 'Affān, sometimes argued for the necessity of suppressing the traditions of the Prophet by referring to the Sunnah or conduct of the first two Caliphs. For example, he used to say that no one was allowed to mention any tradition that had not been mentioned during the time of Abū Bakr or 'Umar. Since we know that no one was allowed to narrate any tradition during the time of the first and second Caliphs, this automatically applied to his time too.

What was the reason for attempting to prevent the writing and narrating traditions of the Prophet? The explanation generally given was that if people were allowed to mention traditions of the Prophet

1. *Sunan* of al-Dārimī, Kitāb al-Muqaddimah, Sakhr serial no. 274. It has to be noted that 'Abdullāh b. 'Umar was not consistently refraining from narrating ḥadīths, since there are ḥadīths narrated from him. See for example *Musnad of* Ahmad, Sakhr serial nos 6225, 6302, 6304 and 6594.
2. 'Askarī, *Ma'ālim al-Madrisatayn,* Vol. 2, p. 53, cited from *Muntakhab al-Kanz* published in the margin of *Musnad* of Ahmad 4/64.

it could distract them from paying attention to the Qur'ān.[1] If they had been allowed to have two things in parallel, the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, they might devote less attention to the Qur'ān and they might forget it, and this in turn would have made the Qur'ān subject to omissions or alterations.[2]

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1. It has to be noted that this finally leads to the view that the Qur'ān is sufficient and there is no need for ḥadīths. Despite its oddity, this view has on occasions been expressed by some figures. For example, Bukhārī and others have narrated that the Prophet Muḥammad before his death asked people around him to bring some paper for him to write something so that they would never go astray. At that time, 'Umar b. Khaṭṭāb said: 'The Prophet is overwhelmed by illness [in some versions, 'the man is delirious'] and we have the Divine book, which suffices us'. Those present started to quarrel and therefore the Prophet said: 'Leave me! No quarrel should be made in my presence.' Bukhārī adds that Ibn 'Abbās said that the greatest tragedy happened when the Prophet was prevented from writing. (See for example *Ṣaḥīḥ of* Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Jihād, Sakhr serial no. 2825, Kitāb al-Jizyah, Sakhr serial no. 2932, Kitāb al-Maghāzī, nos 4078 and 4079, Kitāb al-Marḍā, no. 5237 and Kitāb al-I'tiṣām bi al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah, no. 6818; *Ṣaḥīḥ of* Muslim, Kitāb al-Waṣīyah, Int. serial nos 3089–3091 and *Musnad of* Ahmad, Musnad Banī Hāshim, Sakhr serial nos 1834, 2835, 2945 and 3165.)
2. The other reason given by some people who did not narrate ḥadīths or narrated only a little is that they were afraid of narrating false ḥadīths. For example, 'Uthmān b.'Affān, (*Musnad of* Ahmad, Musnad al-'Asharah al-Mubashsharīn bi al-Jannah, Sakhr serial no. 439) Zubayr b.'Awwām (*Ṣaḥīḥ of* Bukhārī, Kitāb al-'Ilm, Sakhr serial no. 104 and *Musnad of* Ahmad, Musnad al-'Asharah al-Mubashsharīn bi al-Jannah, Sakhr serial nos 1339 and 1353) and Anas b. Mālik, (Bukhārī, Ibid., no. 105 and *Musnad of* Ahmad, Bāqī Musnad al-Mukthirīn, Sakhr serial no. 12303) said that they did not narrate ḥadīths because they had heard from the Prophet: 'Whoever deliberately attributes to me something that I have not said will be seated in hell'. It seems that these reports and other evidence show that considerable attempts were being made to fabricate ḥadīths and attribute them to the Prophet. These false ḥadīths circulated even among early Muslims, and the Prophet and his devout Companions were worried. However, this does not mean that one should not narrate those true ḥadīths that one has heard from the Prophet or has received from reliable sources. It rather shows the necessity of being careful in narrating ḥadīths and in accepting ḥadīths from those who narrate them. In his *Musnad*, Imām Ahmad b. Ḥanbal narrates that Imām 'Ali said: 'When I tell you some ḥadīths from the Prophet it is better in my eyes to fall from heaven unto earth than to attribute to the Prophet something that he did not say'. (Musnad al-'Asharah al-Mubashsharīn bi al-Jannah, Sakhr serial no. 1072) This is why the household of the Prophet and their followers did not stop narrating and registering true ḥadīths, though they were most careful and extremely cautious in their narration. (Refer to the discussion about Shī'a methodology in ḥadīth studies.)

However, there was no reason to be concerned for the preservation of the Qur'ān at that time, because in the lifetime of the Prophet there were already many people who had memorized the Qur'ān and numerous written copies of the Qur'ān had been made. We know that the Prophet himself gave instructions to the Muslims about the arrangement of the verses and chapters of the Qur'ān. We also know that the Arabs at that time had powerful memories, so there was no cause for concern that the Qur'ān might be forgotten or altered. It is also not reasonable to imagine that Muslims were so careless or weak that they could not take care of the Qur'ān as well as the sayings of the Prophet at the same time. It is inconceivable that such a nation, numbering many great figures among it and possessing moreover God-given talents of memorizing, should not have been able to deal with two treasures at the same time.

In any case, according to the Shī'a and later Sunni traditionists (along with later caliphs, from 'Umar b. 'Abdul 'Azīz onwards), this view was not compatible with the clear Qur'ānic instructions to follow the model of Islamic conduct that the Prophet presented in his Sunnah. It cannot be imagined that the founder of a school of thought should present his ideas but that after his death or even earlier people should be told to ignore what he said or did and not mention or record it. Could people have been expected in such a case to understand the teachings of that school, given that it was the result of revelation and people had no immediate and direct access to its source? How could it have been possible to ask people to understand the Qur'ān while neglecting the teachings of the person to whom the Qur'ān was revealed, and who, according to the Qur'ān itself, was charged with teaching and explaining the Qur'ān?

In any event, there are also clear instructions, narrated by both Shī'a and Sunni scholars, from the Prophet himself on the necessity

of transmitting his ḥadīths to others. For example, in the last year of his blessed life and while returning from Mecca in his final pilgrimage, *hajjat al-widā'*, in a famous and historic statement, the Prophet said: 'May God make happy those people who listen to my speech, comprehend it and then transmit it to those who have not heard it.' There are many people who transmit the knowledge though they themselves may not be knowledgeable, and likewise there are many people who can transmit knowledge to those more knowledgeable than themselves. In many traditions the Prophet prayed for those who listened to his traditions and then reported them to others. For example, Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* narrates that the Prophet said: 'The one present has to relate to the one absent, because there might be some people among those absent who can understand better than those who are present."[1]

Indeed, many companions of the Prophet, as well as all the great traditionists, such as Imām Ahmad b. Ḥanbal, Muslim and Bukhārī who came later and compiled the ḥadīths of the Prophet and even the sayings of his Companions and those who followed them (*al-tābi'ūn*), felt responsible for recording ḥadīths and putting them at the disposal of others. This was one of the means by which Islamic culture could spread and spread. The teachings of the Prophet were needed not only by those who had direct access to him and could learn them from him, but also by all those who came after them.

It deserves to be mentioned here that from the outset the Shī'a paid great attention to the Sunnah of the Prophet and were

1. For example, see *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, Kitāb al-'Ilm, Sakhr serial no. 65, Kitāb al-Ḥajj, Sakhr serial no. 1625, Kitāb al-Maghāzī, Sakhr serial no. 4054, Kitāb al-Uḍḥī, Sakhr serial no. 5124, Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, Sakhr serial no. 6893 and Kitāb al-Fitan, no. 6551; *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, Kitāb al-Qusāmah, Sakhr serial no. 3179; *Sunan of* Ibn Mājah, Kitāb al-Muqaddamah, Sakhr serial no. 229; *Musnad* of Ahmad, Musnad al-Baṣrīyīn, Sakhr serial nos 19594, 19512 and 19492 and *Sunan* of al-Dārimī, Kitāb al-Manāsik, Sakhr serial no. 1836.

determined to record his traditions, as a prerequisite for proper practice and delivery of his message, even though some of them lost their lives in doing so and others were imprisoned.

The Sunnah and the Household of the Prophet

We turn now to the role of the Household of the Prophet in presenting Islam. This will involve two topics: the justification for considering the Household of the Prophet as a reliable source in understanding Islam, and the necessity of adhering to their teachings in understanding Islam.

With respect to the first topic, there is no disagreement among Muslims about the validity of following the teachings of the household of the Prophet in understanding Islam. This includes the Sunnis, who also consider all the Companions of the Prophet as reliable sources for understanding Islam.[1]

The justification for following the teachings of the Household of the Prophet becomes even clearer when we refer to the traditions from the Prophet about his household, and examine sayings of Sunni scholars about the knowledge of 'Ali and other members of the household of the Prophet. For example, Abū Ḥanīfah says: 'If it were not for those two years, I would surely have been destroyed.' Those 'two years' were the period he spent studying with Imām Ja'far Ṣādiq, the sixth Imām, and attending his lectures.[2] Imām

1. Sunni Muslims hold that whoever met the Prophet for even one session while believing in him is considered as a Companion of the Prophet and can be relied on in acquiring knowledge about Islam. Accordingly, members of the Household of the Prophet such as Imām 'Ali and Fāṭima who have always been with the Prophet and had the closest relation to the Prophet are unquestionably reliable sources.

2. In a survey about those people who narrated from Imām Ṣādiq, Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 148) asserts that those who were trustworthy among them from different (continued...)

Mālik says: 'No eyes have seen, no ears have heard, and nothing has come to the heart of any human being better than Ja'far b. Muḥammad in his knowledge, in his piety, in his asceticism and in his servitude to God.' This is what Ibn Taymīyah reports from Imām Mālik.[1] There is no ambiguity in these statements, which is why many Sunni scholars have clearly pointed out that every Muslim is allowed to act according to one of the five Islamic schools of jurisprudence (*fiqh*): *Ja'farī*, *Ḥanafī*, *Ḥanbalī*, *Mālikī* and *Shāfi'ī*.

The reason for this is clear: even if Imām Ja'far Ṣādiq or other members of the Household of the Prophet did not possess more knowledge or better access to the knowledge of the Prophet than others, one has to admit that he must have been at least equal to others, especially if he is said to have taught them. People who are educated or who are seeking the truth are expected, therefore, to examine all Islamic sources available, and thus come to a conclusion about the ways Muslims can lead exemplary lives. Certainly one rich source is the teachings of the Household of the Prophet. Historically, however, for one reason or another, perhaps because of some kind of pressure, not all scholars fully conveyed the traditions of the Household of the Prophet.

It is thus quite clear that whoever tries to understand Islam and the Sunnah of the Prophet can refer to the teachings of his Household.

Now let us see whether it is necessary to refer to the Household of the Prophet in order to understand Islam or whether it is simply a matter of choice. In answering the question we will focus on some traditions from the Prophet narrated by great Sunni traditionists

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(...continued)
schools of thought numbered 4,000 (*Al-Irshād*).

1. *Al-Tawassul wa al-Wasīlah*, p. 52, first edition.

and accepted by both Sunni and Shī'a scholars. It must first be noted, however, that all the teachings of the Household of the Prophet were always based on the Glorious Qur'ān and the Sunnah of the Prophet. No one should think that, for example, Imām Ṣādiq said something concerning Islam based on his own opinion. Whatever he and the other Imāms uttered was exactly what they had themselves received from the Prophet. There are many traditions in this regard. For example, in *Uṣūl al-Kāfī* we find that Imām Ṣādiq proclaimed that whatever he said was what he had received through his forefathers from the Prophet. This is a crucial point: all the traditions of Imāms were received directly from the Prophet.

One of the traditions indicating the necessity of following the Household of the Prophet is the famous tradition of *Thaqalayn.* This tradition was uttered by the Prophet on several different occasions, including the day of 'Arafah in his last pilgrimage and the 18th of Dhū al-Ḥijjah at the location known as Ghadīr Khumm. Despite minor differences in the wording, the content is the same in all versions of the tradition. For example, in one version the Prophet is recorded to have said:

> O people! I leave among you two precious things: the Book of God and my Household. As long as you hold on to them you will not go astray.

Or in another version the Prophet is reported to have said:

> I leave among you two precious things; if you hold on to them, you will not go astray after me: the Book of God, which is like a rope extended between the heaven and the earth, and my Household. These two things will not separate from each other

until they reach me near the fountain on the Day of Judgement. Be alert and careful how you treat them after me.

This shows that the Prophet was worried about the way that Muslims, or at least some of them, would treat the Qur'ān and his Household. In another tradition he said:

I leave two successors: one is the Book of God, which is like a rope extended between heaven and the earth, and the second is my Household. They will not separate from each other until they come to me near the fountain of *Kawthar*.

The above traditions can be found in major Sunni sources, such as *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim (Vol. 8, p. 25, no. 2408), *Musnad* by Imām Ahmad (Vol. 3, p. 388, no. 10720), *Sunan* by Dārimī (Vol. 2, p. 432) and *Ṣaḥīḥ* by Tirmidhī (Vol. 5, p. 6432, no. 3788). They are also mentioned in books such as *Usd al-Ghābah* by Ibn al-Athīr (Vol. 2, p. 13), *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā* by Bayhaqī (Vol. 2, p. 198) and Muttaqī al-Hindī's *Kanz al-'Ummāl* (Vol. 1, p. 44).

The meaning of the ḥadīth is clearly that the Prophet has left among Muslims two weighty things: the Qur'ān and his Household, and that as long as people hold on to them both, they will not go astray. This shows that these two things must always be in harmony with each other and that they never contradict each other. Otherwise, the Prophet would not have given the people the instruction to follow both of them; they would be bewildered if the household of the Prophet were to tell them to go in one direction and the Book of God told them to go in another. Although this is implied at the very beginning of the ḥadīth, the Prophet himself

made it explicit by concluding, 'They will not separate from each other until they come to me near the fountain of *Kawthar*.'

Thus, this ḥadīth in all its versions indicates that:

- From the time of the Prophet until the end of the world the Book of God and the Household of the Prophet will always be together.

- No one can say that the book of God is enough and that we do not need the Household of the Prophet, or vice versa, for the Prophet clearly said: 'I leave two precious things that you must grasp and if you do so you will not be misled.'

- The Household of the Prophet never make mistakes and they are always truthful.

- Just like the Qur'ān, the Household of the Prophet will enjoy a type of continuity until the Day of Judgement when they will join the Prophet near *Kawthar*. Thus, the Household of the Prophet will never disappear, even for a short period of time.

The other ḥadīth is known as the ḥadīth of *Safīnah*.[1] Sunni and Shi'i traditionists alike have narrated that the Prophet said:

> Be aware that surely the parable of my household among you is like the ship of Noah. Whoever embarked on the ship of Noah was saved and whoever refused to do so was drowned.

1. *Safīnah* means 'ship'.

In another tradition the Prophet adds something else. After comparing his Household to the ship of Noah, he also likened it to the Gate of *Ḥiṭṭah* for the tribes of the Children of Israel, 'whoever entered by which was forgiven by God'. (Qur'ān, 2:58) This means then that whoever enters the knowledge and advice of his Household and is modest and humble towards them, will be forgiven by God and be guided. Ibn Ḥajar, a great Sunni scholar, maintains that the reason for the Prophet's comparing his household to the ship of Noah is that whoever loves and respects the Household of the Prophet and grasps the guidance of the knowledgeable men of that Household will be saved from the darkness of conflict and disagreement, while those who refuse to be with the Household of the Prophet will be drowned in the sea of ingratitude for divine blessing and be destroyed. Then he goes on to explain why the Prophet compared his Household to *Bāb al-Ḥiṭṭah*. Ibn Ḥajar says that according to the Qur'ān whoever enters this *Bāb al-Ḥiṭṭah* (which might be the gate either of Jericho or of Jerusalem [*Bayt al-Maqdis*]) with humility and asks forgiveness from God will receive it. He concludes that as entrance through this gate led to forgiveness for the tribes of the Children of Israel, following the teachings and advice of the Household of the Prophet will lead to forgiveness for the Islamic nation (*Ummah*).[1]

In another tradition, the Prophet compared his Household to stars in the sky that help travellers to find their way:

> Stars save people from being drowned, and my Household saves people from disagreement and conflicts. If a group of Arabs disagree with my Household they will suffer disagreements

1. Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Sawā'iq al-Muḥriqah*, Chapter 11, p. 91.

among themselves; they will lose their unity and become the party of Satan.[1]

The ḥadīth of *Safīnah* in its different versions thus emphasizes the same importance of the Household of the Prophet as the ḥadīth previously cited. It can be found in different Sunni books, such as the *Mustadrak* of Ḥākim Nīshābūrī, Vol. 3, pp. 149 and 151, *Arba'īn Ḥadīth* of Nawbahānī and *al-Sawā'iq al-Muḥriqah* by Ibn Ḥajar.

According to these traditions, following the guidance of the Household of the Prophet is of the utmost necessity; those who refuse to do so will be unable to find the right direction and will drown in the sea of ignorance, conflict and disagreement.

We thus conclude that it is valid to resort to the traditions of the household of the Prophet in understanding what the Prophet meant and mentioned, and that it is indeed necessary to do so.

Note: The tradition of *Thaqalayn* is mentioned in both Sunni and Shī'a sources and is therefore accepted by all Muslims. However, in one version of the ḥadīth the Prophet is quoted as saying 'my Sunnah' instead of 'my Household.' Although this version can be found only in some Sunni sources, there is no difficulty in understanding what this tradition means, assuming this version to be authentic. The Prophet in many traditions narrated by all Muslims has said: 'I am leaving two precious things, and those are the glorious Qur'ān and my Household', whereas in a few traditions narrated by one group of Muslims only he is reported to have said: 'the glorious Qur'ān and my Sunnah'. Obviously the conclusion to be drawn is that as one side of the Comparison is the same, i.e. the

1. Because when they conflict with each other naturally they simply want to defeat each other and they forget God's pleasure, with the result that they end up following Satan.

Qur'ān, the other side too must be identical. Therefore, 'my Sunnah' and 'my Household' must be identical, for otherwise one would have to say that the Prophet contradicted himself. Referring to the teachings and advice of the Household of the Prophet is thus identical to referring to the Sunnah of the Prophet. The only way to gain perfect access to the Sunnah of the Prophet and to understand it precisely is to refer to those who had the closest relationship with him and knew better than anyone else what he said or did or approved.

Who Constitutes the Household of the Prophet?

Another question concerns the exact meaning of 'the Household'. In the numerous traditions that enjoin upon us adherence to the Household of the Prophet, they are referred to as *Ahl al-Bayt* or *al-'Itrah*. What do these terms refer to and what persons are encompassed in the scope of the Household of the Prophet? Does it include any and all relatives of the Prophet? Three separate points will be made in answer to these questions, although each point might be regarded as conclusive in itself. Of course, there is no doubt among Muslims that Fāṭima, the daughter of the Prophet, Imām 'Ali, and their sons, Imām Ḥasan and Imām Ḥusayn, belonged to the Household of the Prophet. The only question is whether other relatives of the Prophet may be included in that category or not and, if so, to what extent. Some Sunni Muslims believe that all relatives of the Prophet should be included, excluding of course those who did not embrace Islam, such as Abū Lahab, an uncle of the Prophet who was at the same time one of his bitterest enemies and was accordingly cursed in the Qur'ān. Shī'a Muslims, by contrast, believe that the Household of the Prophet are

only those persons who have levels of faith and knowledge that make it possible for them to be mentioned together with the Qur'ān in the *Thaqalayn* and other traditions. Moreover, they believe that the Prophet himself has clearly defined the members of his Household.

First Point

Whenever we have doubts about the scope of something such as a rule or a concept, but we know that it is necessarily true to a certain limit, beyond which it comes into question, we must exercise caution and observe only the minimum. For example, suppose that someone is uncertain whether in his prayer at the beginning of the first two units (*rak'ah*), he can recite only the *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah* or whether he can recite other chapters of the Qur'ān as well. Reason determines that he should be cautious and must recite that which he is certain about – the *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*. Now in our case if someone has a doubt concerning the scope of the term *Ahl al-Bayt* or similar terms, he is rationally obliged to restrict himself to the minimum concerning which he is certain. So if one is in doubt whether God approves of reference to people other than Fāṭima and her family, together with the Qur'ān, as part of the Household of the Prophet, reason instructs one to be cautious and to limit oneself to those people who are definitely included in the scope of the term.

Second Point

We saw earlier that the Household of the Prophet have been given a very high position. The Prophet has mentioned them as being next to the Qur'ān: 'I leave among you two weighty things, the Qur'ān and my Household, and they will not separate from each other.' So the Household of the Prophet are always with the Qur'ān and

always will be; they will never contradict each other. Bearing this criterion in our mind, let us examine the early history of Islam in order to find among the relatives of the Prophet those who conform to it.

The only people to whom the Prophet have referred as his trust and as being collectively a partner of the Qur'ān are 'Ali, his wife, Fāṭima, and their offspring. No Muslim, whether Sunni or Shī'a, claims that other relatives of the Prophet had greater knowledge or piety than this family or served Islam more than they did. Moreover, no one can say that the expression 'Household of the Prophet' can include all relatives of the Prophet, for some of them, such as Abū Lahab, were disbelievers and even those who believed in Islam were not all at the same level. Many of them were very ordinary people and accepted Islam quite late. Indeed, the only people for whom this position of permanently accompanying the Qur'ān (in other words, 'infallibility') is claimed, are Fāṭima and her family. Similarly, if a Muslim be asked who could be infallible, he will either mention this group, in accordance with Shī'a belief, or no one at all, because the non-Shī'a do not claim infallibility for any group of people other than the prophets. To put it differently, he will not put forward anyone else as constituting a permanent accompaniment to the Qur'ān.

Here we are not presenting a circular argument to the effect that these people are infallible because the Shī'a claim them to be so. The issue of infallibility will be discussed later in its own right. Our argument here is that, according to the traditions of the Prophet, there must necessarily be a group of his family who will be always with the truth, and since this position has been claimed exclusively for these persons, it is clear that the Prophet had in mind those for whom alone infallibility has been asserted. If the non-Shī'a were to

claim that some people other than those identified by the Shī'a were infallible, one would have to adjudicate between the two claims. However, this is not the case, and if the tradition of the Prophet is to make any sense, the Shī'a position seems therefore to provide the only solution.

Third Point

The Prophet himself has clarified what he meant by his *Ahl al-Bayt* or *al-'Itrah*. This is reflected in the following ḥadīths found in major Sunni sources:

1. Muslim narrates from 'Āyishah:

   > The Prophet went out wearing a black woollen cloak, when Ḥasan the son of 'Ali, came to him, so the Prophet let Ḥasan come in with him under the cloak. Then Ḥusayn came and he too entered. Then Fāṭima came. She entered as well. Then 'Ali came. He also went under the cloak, such that the cloak covered the Prophet, 'Ali, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. Then the Prophet recited: 'God only desires to keep away impurity from you, O People of the House! and to purify you a [thorough] purification.' (33:33)[1]

2. Muslim narrates from Sa'd b. Abī Waqqās that he was asked by Mu'āwīyah why he refused to abuse 'Ali verbally. Sa'd replied: 'I remember three sayings of the Prophet about 'Ali, which caused me not to say anything bad about him. If I possessed even one of

1. *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, Vol. 4, p. 1883, no. 2424. (Kitāb Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥābah, Bāb Faḍā'il Ahl al-Bayt, Sakhr serial no. 4450).

these qualities it would be better for me than red camels.[1] The first was that, when the Prophet wanted to go to the war of Tabūk, he left 'Ali in Medina. 'Ali was very sad that he was not fortunate enough to join the army and fight for the sake of God. He went to the Prophet, saying: "Do you leave me with the children and women?" The Prophet replied: "Are you not happy to be to me, as Aaron was to Moses, except that there will be no prophet after me?" Second is what I heard from the Prophet on the day of the conquest of Khaybar: "Certainly I will give the flag [of Islam] to a man who loves God and His Messenger and is loved by God and His Messenger." We hoped to be given the flag, but the Prophet said: "Call 'Ali for me!" 'Ali came forward, although he was suffering from pain in his eyes. The Prophet gave him the flag and at his hands God granted us victory. The third instance is that when the verse of *Mubāhalah* was revealed the Prophet called 'Ali, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn and said: "My Lord! These are my household."'[2]

3. Muslim narrates that some people asked Zayd b. Arqam to tell them what he had heard from the Prophet. He said: 'I have become very old and it was a long time ago. I have also forgotten some of what I knew from the Prophet. So whatever I tell you accept it, and whatever I do not tell you, do not force me to tell it.' Then he said that once the Prophet stood speaking to us in a place between Mecca and Medina called Khumm. The Prophet started by praising God and preaching. Then the Prophet said: 'O people! Know that I am a human being and soon a messenger from my God [the angel of death] will call me and I will answer

1. Red camels were considered very valuable in those days.
2. *Ṣaḥīḥ of* Muslim, Vol. 4, p. 1871, no. 2408. (Kitāb Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥābah, Sakhr serial no. 4420).

him. Surely, I am leaving among you two precious things. The first is the Book of God, in which there is guidance and light, so hold on to the Book of God.' Having encouraged and urged the people to do so, the Prophet then said: 'and the second is my household'. He added (three times): 'I ask you to remember God in [the way you treat] my Household.' Then Ḥusayn b. Ṣubrah said: 'O Zayd! Who are the Household of the Prophet? Are his wives included?' Zayd replied that the wives of the Prophet are his relatives, but his Household are those who cannot accept charity (*ṣadaqah*), and his wives do not have such a position. Then the person asked: 'So who are they?' Zayd replied: 'The family of 'Ali [the cousin of the Prophet], the family of Aqil [the brother of 'Ali], the family of Ja'far [the other brother of 'Ali] and the family of 'Abbās [the uncle of the Prophet and 'Ali].'[1]

4. Under the same heading Muslim mentions another version of the ḥadīth, the beginning of which is the same as the one mentioned above, but the end of which is different. According to this version, in response to the question of whether the wives of the Prophet were included in his household, Zayd b. Arqam says: 'No, I swear by God. A wife lives with her husband for a period of time and then she may get divorced and return to her own father and family. The Household of the Prophet are only those who are from the same root and origin as the Prophet and those who are prohibited to take charity [even] after the Prophet.'[2]

Thus, the expression 'Household of the Prophet' (*Ahl al-Bayt*) does not include all the relatives of the Prophet. The wives of the Prophet are not considered as belonging to the Household in this

1. *Ṣaḥīḥ of* Muslim, Vol. 4, p. 1873, no. 2408 (Kitāb Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥābah, Sakhr serial no. 4425).
2. Ibid., p. 1874.

particular sense, although they are members of his family and much respected. According to ḥadīths, the expression *Ahl al-Bayt* or *al-'Itrah* has a specific and limited sense.

Based on ḥadīths, Shī'a scholars believe that every descendant of Hāshim, the great-grandfather of the Prophet, is in a sense his Household and called *'Sayyid'*. There are certain rules in Islamic jurisprudence pertaining to them, such as prohibition of taking charity. But again according to ḥadīths and the above arguments, the term *Ahl al-Bayt* in its Qur'ānic sense and in the sense used in the Prophetic ḥadīths such as those of *Thaqalayn*, *Safīnah* and the cloak is more limited, for it applies only to Fāṭima, 'Ali, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn and then to other Imāms of his Household.

5. Imām Ahmad b. Ḥanbal narrates from 'Umar b. Maymūn that he said: 'We were sitting next to Ibn 'Abbās, the cousin of the Prophet and a great scholar. A group of nine people came to him and asked him either to go with them or to ask the people present to leave the place. Ibn 'Abbās went with them. After a while, Ibn 'Abbās came back very angry because of the bad things that he had heard from them about 'Ali.' The narrator adds that then Ibn 'Abbās started to describe the position of 'Ali in the eyes of the Prophet and some of his merits. He mentioned the conquest of Khaybar by 'Ali and the announcement of the revelation of *Sūrat al-Tawbah* to the polytheists by 'Ali.' Then he mentioned another event in which the Prophet addressed his cousins and asked: 'Who among you is prepared to believe in me and follow me in this universe and hereafter?' Imām Ahmad says that all the cousins of the Prophet refused to give a positive response. There was only one positive answer and that was from

1. For the story of the conquest of Khaybar, see also *Ṣaḥīḥ of* Muslim, Kitāb Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥābah, Sakhr serial nos 4422, 4423 and 4424.

'Ali. This question and answer was repeated once more in the same session. Finally the Prophet said: 'You are my *walīy* (vicegerent) in this world and the hereafter.' Ibn 'Abbās also mentioned that 'Ali was the first man who embraced Islam.

The other event that Ibn 'Abbās mentioned and is fully relevant to our discussion here is that the Prophet took his cloak, covered with it Fāṭima, 'Ali, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn and recited the verse: 'God only desires to keep away impurity from you, O People of the House! and to purify you a [thorough] purification.' (33:33)[1]

6. Al-Tirmidhī narrates that 'Umar b. Abī Salāmah, who was a stepson of the Prophet, reported from his mother, Umm Salāmah, that the Prophet asked 'Ali, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn to come under his cloak, and that he then said: 'O God! These are my Household [*Ahl al-Bayt*]. Remove all uncleanliness from them and purify them a [thorough] purification!' Then God revealed the verse (33:33) to his Prophet. Umm Salamah says: 'I was there and I asked the Prophet: Am I one of your household?' The Prophet replied: 'You have your own place, you are good.'[2] Thus, the Prophet confirmed her value, but not as a member of *Ahl al-Bayt*.

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1. *Musnad of* Imām Ahmad b. Ḥanbal, Musnad of Banī Hāshim, Int. serial no. 2903. In the rest of the ḥadīth, Ibn 'Abbās mentioned other events in which 'Ali rendered services to Islam, such as the incident of *Laylat al-Mabīt*, when he slept in the house of the Prophet in order to make the pagans think that the Prophet was still in his house asleep, while he was actually migrating to Medina. He also mentions that when the Prophet wanted to go to Tabūk he left Imām 'Ali to take his place in Medina. Ibn 'Abbās also mentioned that the Prophet blocked all the private doors to his mosque except the door opening to the house of 'Ali, so he alone was able to enter the mosque directly.
2. *Sunan of* al-Tirmidhī, Internal serial no. 3719. A similar ḥadīth can be found in Ibid., no. 3129. See also *Musnad of* Ahmad, Bāqī Musnad al-Anṣār, Sakhr serial no. 25300.

7. Imām Ahmad b. Ḥanbal narrates from Anas b. Mālik that when the verse of *taṭhīr* (33:33) was revealed, for six months the Prophet used to call at the house of 'Ali and Fāṭima every morning on his way to the mosque for the dawn prayer of and call out:: 'Prayer, O People of the House!'[1]

There are also traditions clarifying the meaning of the expression *al-Qurbā* ('near ones'), which occurs several times in the Qur'ān, as when the Prophet is instructed to ask not for any payment in return for his teachings but only that people should love his *Qurbā* (42:23).[2] Zamakhsharī, a great Sunni scholar and exegete of the Qur'ān, says that when this verse was revealed the Prophet was asked who are meant by this verse. The Prophet replied: 'Ali, Fāṭima and their two sons'.[3]

The Reason

The Shī'a believe that the reason is a reliable source of knowledge and that it is in complete harmony with revelation. According to some ḥadīths, God has two proofs (*ḥujjah*) by means of which humans can understand His will: the internal one, reason (*al-'aql*), and the external one, the prophets. Sometimes reason is called 'the internal prophet' and the prophets are called 'the external reason'. There is an established rule among Shī'a jurists that whatever judgement is made by reason is the same as that made by religion (*shar'*) and vice versa. It is also unanimously accepted that one of the

1. *Musnad* of Imām Ahmad b. Ḥanbal, Sakhr serial no. 13231. See also *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhī, Sakhr serial no. 3130.
2. See Chapter Three, the Love for the Prophet.
3. *Al-Kashshāf* by Zamakhsharī. Vol. 3, p. 467.

conditions of moral or legal responsibility is to have sound reason. If someone is insane, he is not considered as responsible for his acts. What is expected of people in religion also varies according to their mental and rational capacity. Those with a higher degree of intelligence or learning are expected to be more knowledgeable, pious and obedient than those who are uneducated or ignorant. For example, according to a divine saying (*ḥadīth al-qudsī*), God rewards and punishes people in proportion to their reason.

According to the Qur'ān, God requires all human beings to exercise their rational faculty and to ponder on His signs and communications in the universe. On many occasions disbelievers are condemned and criticized because of their failure to think or to act according to rational requirements. For example, they are condemned because of their blind imitation of their ancestors, and there are many verses containing rhetorical questions calling on people to think, such as: 'Do not they think?' or 'Do not they ponder?'

In general, reason contributes to religious sciences in three major areas. The first is the understanding of the realities of the world, such as the existence of God, the truth of religion and scientifically established truths. The second is the presenting of moral and legal principles, such as the wrongness of oppression and the rightness of justice. The third is the setting up of standards and logical processes for reasoning and inference. All three roles of reason are recognized and even encouraged in Islam.

It is reason that takes the first step towards religion, enquiring into it and searching for its truth. It is reason that drives us to take the issue seriously and tells us that our interests will be harmed if the claims of religion are true but yet we fail to discover them and to believe in them.

Once we have started our researches and investigations, it is again reason that instructs us how to think and how to argue. It is also reason that tells us to be fair, pious, truth-seeking and committed to the truth during and after the entire process of rational discovery. We cannot say that one must believe in God or Islam because God says so or because the Qur'ān requires it. We cannot even say that one has to investigate the truth of religion because the religion itself tells us to do so. It is reason that urges us to enquire about religion and thereby discover the veracity of the Qur'ān and the Prophet. Reason thus has a crucial role with respect to religious belief. Everyone must make his or her own enquiry regarding religion and discover the truth independently, and no one can rely on others. Of course, once the truth of a given prophet or book is established, many further truths can be learnt from that prophet or that book.

In respect of practical laws and moral values, the relevant principles are understood by reason. Details are, of course, provided by religious sources, although the process of understanding the scriptures and the implications of religious judgements again is governed by reason. For example, if God says that you must perform *Ḥajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca), the rational implication is that we must make all necessary preparations, such as buying tickets or obtaining a visa. If there is a conflict between two obligations such as saving an innocent life and performing our prayers, what should we do? In this case, even if there is no explicit or particular religious instruction we still understand that we must act according to the certain and clear judgement of our reason, which is to save the person's life.

In contrast, the role of revelation or scripture in religious sciences can be summed up as follows:

- confirming truths that are already known by reason;

- presenting new subjects not known by the reason, such as the details of the resurrection and detailed injunctions of moral and legal systems;

- establishing due recompense sanctions through the religiously determined system of reward and punishment.

It should also be mentioned that having verified the truth of the Prophet or the Qur'ān, we come to know many things that we were unable to know by ourselves, because of our lack of access to certain realms of reality or certain evidence. One must therefore distinguish between what lies beyond one's actual rational capacity and what conflicts with rational standards. The first case concerns matters that are entirely possible, for it corresponds to our experience in our everyday life and we know, too, that our ability to understand may gradually increase. The second case concerns matters that are impossible. In short, there is nothing irrational in Islam. Of course, one has to distinguish between certain and decisive rational judgements, on the one hand, and speculative or personal opinions, on the other. If in a given case it seems that rational judgement is in conflict with a religious ordinance, one must investigate where the error lies: either it was not a truly or accurately rational judgement or it was not a religious law. God never misleads people by telling them to do one thing through the prophets, and the opposite thing through their God-given reason. There have often been some judgements attributed to reason and taken as contradicting religious positions, which after close examination have proven contrary, in fact, to decisive rational premises.

M. R. Muzaffar in his commentary on reason says the following:

> We believe that Allah has endowed us with the faculty of the intellect (*'aql*), and that He has ordered us to ponder over His Creation, noting with care the signs of His Power and His Glory throughout the entire universe as well as within ourselves. It is stated in the Qur'ān: 'We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and in themselves, till it is clear to them that it is the Truth.' (41:53)
>
> Allah has shown His disapproval of those who blindly follow the ways of those who were before them: 'They say: "No, but we will follow such things as we found our fathers doing." What! And if their fathers had no understanding of anything?' (2:170)
>
> And He has shown His dislike for those who follow nothing but their own personal whims: 'They follow naught but an opinion.' (6:117)

Indeed, our intellect forces us to reflect upon Creation so as to know the Creator of the universe, just as it makes it necessary for us to examine the claims of someone to prophethood and to consider the truth of his miracles. It is not correct to accept the ideas of someone without criticism, even if that person has the gift of great knowledge or holds an esteemed position.

Consensus

Traditionally one of the sources of understanding Islam is considered to be consensus (*ijmā'*). According to the Shī'a methodology of thought, the consensus of all people or a group of

people, such as the scholars, is not sufficient by itself to serve as a proof (*ḥujjah*), for just as one person may make a mistake, two, three, thousands or even all of them may do so. However, whenever there exists an agreement among all Muslims or Muslim scholars such that it unveils the Sunnah, it can serve as a proof, as an instrument to discover the will of God. For example, when we find that all Muslims in the time of the Prophet said their prayers in a certain way we realize that the Prophet had instructed them to do so; otherwise there would be no factor accounting for their uniformity of action. It is impossible to imagine that they all acted blindly and without instruction, or that they were all in error and the Prophet failed to correct them.

Thus, for the Shī'a consensus is not a proof in itself; it is authoritative only when it leads to the discovery of the Sunnah. Accordingly, if Muslims today agree on a given subject, a scholar who has doubts on the same subject cannot permissibly suppress them by invoking the view of the majority and conforming to it. There have been many cases in the history where all human beings held a belief that later turned out to be wrong, for example that the earth is flat. It is only the Qur'ān and the Sunnah that are unquestionably true and immune from any error or mistake. This approach grants a type of dynamism to Shī'i thought, so that every generation of scholars – in fact, each individual scholar – is able and indeed required to refer directly to the Qur'ān and Sunnah and conduct original *ijtihād,* i.e. investigation and independent judgement. *ijtihād* has never been banned or terminated in the Shī'a world. The Shī'a believe that the view of no jurist, however high his position, is immune from scholarly questioning or rational challenge. Of course, as in any other discipline, every religious

scholar needs to consult the works of his predecessors and examine them carefully.

Some Sunni Muslims believe that whenever in any age all Muslims or Muslim scholars agree unanimously on something, they must be right. It is possible that a person or a group of Muslims may make a mistake, but it is not possible that all of them should do so. They base this view on a ḥadīth they narrate from the Prophet: 'My nation (*Ummah*) will never agree on an error.'

The Shī'a believe that even if the authenticity of this ḥadīth is assumed, it has little practical effect or ability to settle debates or resolve doubts, because Muslim scholars rarely if ever agree on complicated questions for the solution of which no evidence can be adduced from the Qur'ān or the Sunnah. Moreover, the Shī'a believe that there is always an infallible Imām among the Muslims; since he never errs, the Islamic nation taken as a whole will never agree on an error. The problem, of course, is to verify that all Muslims, including the infallible Imām, have held the same view on a given question.

THREE

Doctrines

Despite their differences, Muslims have throughout history shared broad agreement not only on many of the principles of Islam, but also on many of its practices. The Qur'ān and the great personality of the Prophet, on the one hand, and the sincere love and devotion of all Muslims towards them both, on the other hand, have unified Muslims and made of them a real nation that has its own identity, heritage, aims, objectives and destiny. The hostility of the enemies of Islam, who have always tried to uproot Islam as a whole, and the challenges of the age have also helped to awaken and strengthen the sense of unity and brotherhood among Muslims. The Qur'ānic and Prophetic call for unity and brotherhood has always been echoed by the great leading personalities of the different schools of thought in Islam.

With respect to beliefs, all Muslims share the belief in God and His unity, in the prophets in general and the mission of the Prophet Muḥammad in particular, which is to deliver the final message of God for human beings, together with resurrection and the just and equal treatment of everybody on the Day of Judgement. These are the most fundamental principles of Islam, which are agreed upon by

all Muslims. An outsider's view of the extent of the agreement between Shī'a and Sunni Muslims is expressed in the following passage:

Since the Iranian Revolution everyone knows that Shī'ites are Muslims, who, like the Sunnis, respect the central dogma of the oneness of God, the same sacred writing [the Koran], the same Prophet Muḥammad, the same belief in the resurrection followed by the last Judgement and the same fundamental obligations, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, almsgiving and *jihād*[1] [holy war]. These common points are more important than the differences: there is no longer any theoretical objection to a Shī'ite performing his prayers with a Sunni or vice versa, although many difficulties have existed in the past and in practice still remain.[2]

In what follows, we will first provide a short account of Islamic doctrines and then examine the articles of faith enumerated above in greater detail. Finally, the distinctive beliefs of the Shī'a will be expounded.

A Brief Description of Islam

In reply to a request from al-Ma'mūn, the Abbasid Caliph of his time, that he write for him a brief description of the essence of Islam, Imām 'Ali b. Mūsā al-Riḍā (d. 203 AH) affirmed the following:

Truly, the essence of Islam is:

1. In the main text, the spelling is 'jehad.'
2. Richard, *Shi'ite Islam*, p. 5; with abbreviation.

to bear witness that there is no god but Allah, the only one and absolutely unique God who is impenetrable, self-subsisting, hearing, seeing, omnipotent, eternal, self-existent, everlasting, knowing such that He is never ignorant of anything, powerful such that He never fails, rich such that He never needs, just in that He never oppresses and truly He is the Creator of everything. There is nothing like Him. He has no similar, no opposite, no peer and no equal and truly He is the object of worship, prayer, hope and fear.

And it is to bear witness that truly Muḥammad is His servant, His messenger, His trusted one, His chosen one, the best among His people, the master of the messengers, the Seal of the prophets and the most excellent creature. There is no prophet after him and no alteration in his religion and no change in his law (*Sharī'ah*) and truly whatever Muḥammad b. 'Abdullāh has brought is the obvious truth [and it is to acknowledge him and all messengers, prophets and proofs of Allah before him] and to acknowledge his Book, the truthful, the splendid, which is such that 'no falsehood shall approach it from either in front or behind; a revelation from one [who is] the Wise, the Praiseworthy'[1] and truly the Qur'ān is superior to all the books and is true from the beginning to the end. We believe in its *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*, *'āmm* and *khāṣṣ*, promise and threat, the abrogating and the abrogated, its narratives and its reports. No creature is able to bring something similar to it.

And it is to bear witness that the guide after him and the witness over the believer and the upholder of Muslims' affairs and the speaker on behalf of the Qur'ān and the one knowledgeable of its laws, his brother, his successor, executor of

1. 24:42.

his will, his guardian and the one who was to him as Hārūn was to Mūsā is 'Ali b. Abū Ṭālib, the commander of believers and the leader of the pious, the best successor and the heir of the knowledge of the prophets and messengers, and after him Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, the 'two masters of the youths of Paradise' and then 'Ali b. Ḥusayn, the pride of those who worship, then Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-Sadiq [the truthful] the heir to the knowledge of the successors, then Mūsā b. Ja'far al-Kāẓim, then 'Ali b. Mūsā al-Riḍā, then Muḥammad b. 'Ali, then 'Ali b. Muḥammad, then Ḥasan b. 'Ali, then al-Ḥujjah, the one who rises, the awaited.

I bear witness to their successorship and Imāmate and that the earth will never be empty of the presence of the divine witness (*ḥujjah*) upon His people at any age, and that they are the firmest handhold and Imāms of guidance and the witnesses over the people of the world until the end of the world. They are the interpreters of the Qur'ān and the speakers on behalf of the Prophet and whoever dies without knowing them has died in ignorance. Their faith consists of piety, knowledge, truthfulness, prayer, uprightness, striving, to return the trust [given in safekeeping] back to their owners, be they good or bad, long prostrations, fasting during the day, worship during the night, refraining from the forbidden, waiting for deliverance (*faraj*) with patience, good consolation and nobility of companionship.

Then the Imām went on to elucidate the practical laws of Islam.

Principles of Religion

Unity of God

The Islamic faith is formulated by the declaration of two truths: that there is no god (i.e. none worthy of worship) but God (*Allāh*) and that Muḥammad is His messenger. (*LĀ ILĀHA IL-LAL-LĀH MUḤAMMADUR-RASŪ-LUL-LĀH*). Muslims believe that Allah is One. He has no partner or children. He is the Beginning and He is the End. He is Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent. He is closer to man than his jugular vein, but He cannot be seen by the eyes or encompassed by the intellect. In a supplication, Imām 'Ali says:

> O God, verily I ask Thee by Thy Name, in the name of Allah, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate, O Possessor of Majesty and Splendour, the Living, the Self-subsistent, the Eternal, there is no God other than Thee.

Prophethood

God has created mankind wisely and purposefully (51:56). He has given man reason and free will to find his way towards his perfection and happiness. He has also supplemented human reason with divine revelation. Through His wisdom and justice, He has not left any people or corner of the world without guidance; He has sent prophets to all nations to instruct and guide them. (10:47 and 16:36)

The first prophet was Adam and the last was Muḥammad, the Seal of the Prophets (30:40). The Qur'ān mentions 25 of the prophets and states that there were many more. (40:78) Through

indications contained in ḥadīths, Muslims believe there have been 124,000 prophets. Among those mentioned in the Qur'ān are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, Aaron, Ezekiel, David, Solomon, Jonah, Zachariah, John the Baptist, Jesus and Muḥammad. Among them, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad had a universal mission and brought specific codes of law. They are called *Ulū al-'Aẓm*, 'possessors of great determination.'

Other than the Qur'ān itself, the Qur'ān speaks of four revealed books: the Book of Abraham (87:19); the Psalms of David (4:63 and 17:55); the Torah of Moses (2:87, 3:3 and 4, 6:91 and 154); and the Gospel of Jesus (5:46).

A Muslim must believe in all the revealed books (2:4 and 285) and in all the prophets. (4:152) As we will see later, the Shī'a also believe that all the prophets were necessarily infallible and sinless both prior to and during their mission.

Resurrection

The world will come to an end on the Day of Resurrection (*Qiyāmah*) or Judgement. All men will be resurrected and presented before God, Who will decide their individual fates according to their beliefs and deeds in this world. There will be rewards for the good and punishments for the bad. (22:1, 2, 6–10; 3:185; 6:62; 98:6–8; 99:6–8; 101:4–11) God will treat people with justice but the dominant factor in the administration of His Justice will be His Mercy. (6:12)

Note: Although all Muslims believe in the above principles of Islam, there is a slight difference in their articulation of beliefs and practices. Shī'a Muslims articulate the above beliefs as principles or

roots of the religion (*Uṣūl al-Dīn*) and the acts of worship to follow as practices or branches of the religion (*Furūʿ al-Dīn*). The reason for such an articulation is that those beliefs are the most fundamental aspect of the religion and the criteria for being considered a Muslim. However, the mandatory acts of worship are implications of being faithful, since genuine faith manifests itself in practices. Sunni Muslims usually present the declaration of Islam (*kalimah*) –consisting of bearing witness that there is no god but God (*Allāh*) and that Muḥammad is His Messenger – together with four acts of worship, i.e. the daily prayer, fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca and almsgiving, as the Five Pillars of Faith. They consider other acts of worship such as enjoining the good and prohibiting the bad, and struggle (*jihād*) as obligatory acts, but do not include them in the Pillars of Faith.

Shīʿa Doctrines

Having presented an outline of general Islamic beliefs, we will now expand on some of the doctrines of Shīʿi Islam in greater detail. Some of these doctrines are, of course, shared by some non-Shīʿa Muslims as well, at least in principle if not in detail. The reason for singling out these doctrines here is their centrality to Shīʿi thought and belief; whoever believes in all of them can be identified as Shīʿa.

Love for the Prophet Muḥammad

Like other Muslims, the Shīʿa have a great love for the Prophet Muḥammad. They see in him the perfect model of entire reliance on God, profound knowledge of God, ultimate devotion to God,

sincere obedience to the divine will, the noblest character, and a source of compassion and mercy for all mankind. It was not accidental that he was chosen by God to deliver His final and most perfect message for humanity. As suggested earlier, the ability to receive divine revelation presupposes the possession of a very high calibre, and the ability to receive the most perfect revelation of all presupposes the highest calibre of all.

The personal character and behaviour of the Prophet contributed greatly to the progress of Islam. He was known to be an honest, trustworthy and pious person from childhood. During his prophethood, he always lived by his principles and values. In times of ease as well as difficulty, security as well as fear, peace as well as war, victory as well as defeat, he always manifested humility, justice and confidence. He was so humble that he never admired himself, never felt superior to others and never lived a life of luxury. Both when he was alone and powerless as well as when he ruled the Arab peninsula and Muslims were wholeheartedly following him and taking every drop of his ablution water, he behaved in the same way. He lived very simply and always with the people, especially the poor. He had no palace or court or guard. When he was sitting with his companions no one could distinguish him from others by the place where he was seated or the clothes he was wearing. It was only his words and spirituality that distinguished him from the others.

He was so just that he never ignored the rights of anyone, even his enemies. He exemplified in his life the Qur'ānic command, 'O you who believe! Be upright for God, bearers of witness with justice, and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably; act equitably, that is nearer to piety.' (5:8)

Before battles, he always gave instructions to his soldiers not to harm women, children, old people and those who surrendered

themselves, not to destroy farms and gardens, not to chase those who had escaped from the war front, and he enjoined them always to be kind to their captives. Just before his death, he announced in the mosque: 'Whoever feels that I am in debt to him or I have not observed his rights, please come forward and claim his right.' The Muslims wept as they were reminded of all the services that the Prophet had rendered them and the troubles he had undergone in order to guide them. They knew that he never gave any priority to his own needs and never preferred his rest and convenience to that of others. They therefore delivered statements of deep gratitude and respect. But one man stood up and said: 'You owe me something. Before one of the battles you were arranging the soldiers in a row and your stick hit me. Now, I want retaliation.' Without any hesitation the Prophet told one of his close companions to go to his home and bring the same stick and asked the man to retaliate by hitting him. But the man said: 'Your stick hit the skin of my stomach.' Therefore, the Prophet lifted his shirt so that he could hit the skin. Instead of doing so, the man suddenly kissed his body. The man's whole motivation for claiming the right to retaliate may have been to kiss the Prophet, out of respect and love.

The Prophet was so confident that he never developed any doubt about his mission. The hostility of the polytheists manifested itself in the torture, assassination and murder of Muslims, the confiscation of their properties and the spreading of rumours ascribing madness or magic to the Prophet; but none of this ever stopped him. Imām 'Ali, the brave soldier of Islam and the conqueror of Khaybar, says that whenever battle became fierce, Muslims would take refuge with the Prophet.[1]

1. *Nahj al-Balāghah.*

The Prophet was so blessed and beloved that God sent His blessing upon him wherever he was. According to ḥadīth, other prophets were informed of his exalted position with God and on some occasions they asked God to grant their requests for his sake. There are many ḥadīths referring to this, in both Shī'a and non-Shī'a sources. For example, al-Ḥākim al-Nīshābūrī and others narrate from 'Umar that Adam said to God: 'O My Lord, I ask you to forgive me for the sake of Muḥammad.' God told him: 'O Adam, how did you know of Muḥammad when I have not yet created him?' Adam replied:

> O My Lord, [I know him] because when You created me with Your hand and blew from Your spirit in me, I lifted my head and saw written on the pillars of the Throne, 'There is no god but God. Muḥammad is the messenger of God.' Then I knew that the one whose name You have placed next to Yours must be the one most beloved of You.

Then God said: 'You are right. Surely he is the one dearest to me. Call on me for his sake, and I will forgive you. Were it not for Muḥammad, I would not have created you."[1]

Calling Upon the Prophet for Help

Muslims during the life of the Prophet implored him for help. For example, Ahmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Tirmidhī, and Ibn Mājah have narrated that a blind person went to the Prophet and asked him to pray to God that he might cure him. The Prophet said: 'If you wish I will pray, but if you are willing to be patient it would be better for

1. *Mustadrak* by al-Ḥākim, the Book of History in the end of the Book of al-Ba'th, Vol. 2, p. 615.

you.' The man repeated his request. The Prophet told him to make a proper ablution (*wuḍū'*) and to say: 'My Lord! Surely I ask you and I call Your Prophet Muḥammad, the Prophet of mercy. O Muḥammad! Surely I call my God through you in my request so that it can be granted. My Lord! Make Muḥammad my intercessor (*shafī'*)."[1]

Obviously, imploring the Prophet for help continues after his death. According to Islam, death does not imply destruction. Death is a gate to a greater and more intelligent life. The Qur'ān expressly speaks of life after death for all people, and the righteous will have a beatific life after death until they are resurrected on the Day of Judgement and enter eternity. The Qur'ān instructs us not to speak of the martyrs as dead (2:154) or even to think of them as dead (3:169). All humans are alive after death, but the martyrs 'are alive near God and are provided sustenance from their Lord'. (3:169)

Accordingly, both Shī'a and Sunni Muslims believe that the Prophet is definitely alive and that his acknowledgement of our calls and his God-given power to help us are not decreased by passing away from the body. Al-Dārimī narrates that the people of Medina were starving, so they went to 'Ā'ishah, the wife of the Prophet, complaining of their condition. She said:

> Look at [and visit] the grave of the Prophet. Make a hole in the roof above the grave towards the sky, so that there remains no barrier between the grave and the sky.

Al-Dārimī adds that the people of Medina acted as she instructed them and then it rained so much that the grass grew and their

1. *Musnad* of Ahmad, Musnad al-Shāmīyīn, Sakhr serial nos 16604 and 16605; *Sunan of* al-Tirmidhī, Kitāb al-Da'awāt, 3502 and *Sunan* of Ibn Mājah, Kitāb Iqāmah al-Ṣalāh wa al-Sunnah fīhā, Sakhr serial no. 1375.

camels became fat.'[1] Interestingly, Bukhārī narrates that the Caliph 'Umar on several occasions asked God for rain for the sake of 'Abbās who was the uncle of the Prophet, just as he had asked God for rain for the sake of the Prophet himself.[2]

Love for the Household of the Prophet

Although Muslims were deeply indebted to the Prophet and were prepared to do anything for him, the Prophet did not ask them for anything in return. He did all that he did simply for the sake of God.

> Say: I do not ask you for any reward for this. (38:86)

However, God himself asked him to tell people that they should love his household:

> Say: I do not ask of you any payment for this but love for my near relatives. (42:23)

This does not contradict the fact that the Prophet did not ask anything for himself, because the beneficiaries of this love were the people themselves. Again the Qur'ān says:

> Say: Whatever payment I have asked of you, that is only for yourselves; my reward is only with God. (34:47)

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1. *Sunan* of al-Dārimī, Kitāb al-Muqaddamah, Sakhr serial no. 92.
2. *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Jumu'ah, Int. serial no. 954 and Kitāb al-Manāqib, Sakhr serial no. 3434.

In this way, the Prophet directed the people's natural feeling of gratitude towards something that would guide them. It is rather like parent who does everything for his child, such as providing him with food, health care, clothes and money, and then registers him at a school, telling him: 'I do not want anything in return from you. I only want you to learn from your teacher and follow his advice.'

It is thus clear why the Shī'a love the Household of the Prophet. This love has been established by the Prophet and indeed by God Himself as 'the path to the Lord' (25:57), and the Shī'a have accordingly turned this love into a way of life.

It has to be noted that the the previous prophets also did not ask for recompense, examples being Noah (26:109, 11:29 and 10:72), Hūd (26:127 and 11:5), Ṣāliḥ (26:145), Lot (26:164) and Shu'ayb (26:180). Quite apart from the fact that the Prophet Muḥammad had the most difficult task of all the prophets, one striking difference in his case is that he is the only one on record to have been told by God to ask his people to love his Household as their path to their Lord. The reason for this is clear. The Prophet Muḥammad was the Seal of the Prophets and no prophet would come after him. In order to remain on the right path, his followers thereafter needed persons who could preserve and present his pure teachings, especially as they related to the explanation of the Glorious Qur'ān. As seen earlier, this point is very clearly made in the ḥadīths of *Thaqalayn* and *Safīnah*, ḥadīths that are accepted by all Muslims.

Muslims love the household of the Prophet not only because they were his relatives or Companions but also because they exemplified all the values preached by the Prophet. There is no doubt among Muslims that the Household of the Prophet was a collective embodiment of the merits and virtues of the Islamic nation. When

the Prophet Muḥammad had a dispute with the Christians of Najrān, God revealed to him the following:

> Tell anyone who disputes with you in this matter, once knowledge has come to you: 'Come, let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves together; then let us plead, and pray for the curse of God upon the liars.' (3:61)

All Muslim sources narrate that the Prophet took with him Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, representing Muslim children (*abnā'anā* – 'our children'), and Fāṭima, representing Muslim women (*nisā'anā* – 'our women'). He also took 'Ali with him, but as part of his own presence there (*anfusanā* – 'ourselves'). There are also authentic ḥadīths confirming the rank of these four individuals. For example, the Prophet said: 'Fāṭima is part of me. What angers her angers me.'[1] He also said: 'Fāṭima is foremost among the ladies of Paradise.'[2] Of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, the Prophet said: 'Ḥasan and Ḥusayn are masters of the youths of Paradise' and 'Ḥusayn is from me and I am from Ḥusayn.'[3] It is also a well-established fact that when the Prophet wanted to establish the covenant of brotherhood (*'ahd al-*

1. *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Manāqib, Sakhr serial nos 3437 and 3483; *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, Kitāb Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥāah, Sakhr serial no. 4483; *Musnad* of Ahmad, Musnad al-Madanīyīn, Sakhr serial no. 15539 and *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhī, Kitāb al-Manāqib, Sakhr serial no. 3802.
2. See for example *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Manāqib, Sakhr serial no. 3353. (*cf. Sunan* of al-Tirmidhī, Kitāb al-Manāqib, Sakhr serial nos 3808 and 3828). It is also narrated that she was the foremost among all female believers. See for example *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Isti'dhān, no. 5812; *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, Kitāb Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥābah, nos 4487 and 4488 and *Sunan* of Ibn Mājah, Kitāb Mā Jā'a fī al-Janā'iz, no. 161.
3. The first ḥadīth is from *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhī, Kitāb al-Manāqib, Sakhr serial no. 3701. The second is narrated in al-Tirmidhī, Sakhr serial no. 3708, *Sunan* of Ibn Mājah, al-Muqaddimah, Sakhr serial no. 141 and *Musnad* of Ahmad, Musnad al-Shāmīyīn, Sakhr serial no. 16903.

ukhuwwah) among the *Muhājirs* and *Anṣār* in Medina, he chose 'Ali as his own partner and brother, even though they were both *Muhājirs*. Moreover, the Prophet said to 'Ali, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn: 'I am at war with those with whom you are at war and at peace with those with whom you are at peace."[1]

Love for the Household of the Prophet Muḥammad is thus universally upheld by Muslims of all schools of thought, and it has always been considered as a corollary of faith in and love for the Prophet himself. The Shī'a have in particular tried to fulfil all the requirements of this love, which has been established in the Qur'ān as a 'recompense' commensurate with the mission of the Prophet and as a 'path to the Lord'.

Companions of the Prophet

Like other Muslims, the Shī'a have a great respect for the Companions of the Prophet, i.e. those who sincerely embraced Islam and supported the Prophet's mission with their lives and resources without expecting any reward or position, and who remained loyal to the Prophet in all circumstances, especially after his demise, down to the very end of their lives. The Qur'ān says:

> ... those who believe in him and honour him and help him, and follow the light which has been sent down with him, these it is that are the successful. (7:157)

> And [as for] those who believe and do good, and believe in what has been revealed to Muḥammad, and it is the very Truth from

1. Ibid., Sakhr serial no. 3805. Al-Tirmidhī also narrates that among the women Fāṭima was the most beloved by the Prophet and among men 'Ali was the most beloved (Ibid., no. 3803).

their Lord, He will remove their evil from them and improve their condition. (47:2)

Muḥammad is the Messenger of God and those with him are firm of heart against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves ... To those among them who believe and do good, God has promised forgiveness and a great reward. (48:29)

The Shī'a love the Companions of the Prophet who manifested the above-mentioned values in their lives, although there is no particular command in the Qur'ān to love them. Nor is love for them presented as a 'recompense' for the Prophet's mission or as 'a path to one's Lord'. Admiration for faith and good deeds demands admiration in turn for all who led their lives in faithfulness to God and did good deeds, especially those pioneers who preceded others in embracing Islam and supported Islam at its most critical time. The Qur'ān says:

Those who believed and emigrated and struggled for the sake of God with their wealth and their lives stand much higher in rank with God. Those will be the triumphant. (9:20)

The devout companions of the Prophet not only had to defend Islam against the threats of the polytheists, but also had to be fully alert as regards the hypocrites who had penetrated the Muslim community and were plotting continuously with its external enemies. The Qur'ān says:

And among the desert people around you are hypocrites, as well as some from among the people of Medina. They persist in

hypocrisy. You do not know them. We shall punish them twice; then they will be handed over to terrible torment. (9:101)

To safeguard Islam against the hypocrites was the most difficult task for the Prophet and his followers, since the hypocrites had infiltrated the community and pretended to be faithful to the Prophet without being clearly identifiable. Again we read in the Qur'ān:

They swear by God that they are truly of you while they are not of you, but they are a people who are afraid [of you]. (9:57)

The hypocrites had many plans to assassinate the prophet and to start a civil war in Medina.[1] They spoke so beguilingly of Muslim concerns and of their sincere love for Muslims that it seemed they should be counted among the devout Companions of the Prophet:

And when you look at them, their bodies please you, and when they speak, you listen to their words ... They are the enemies. So beware of them; may God curse them. How are they denying the right path? (63:4)

They even went so far as to build a mosque, known as *al-Ḍirār*, and invited the Prophet to pray there. God unveiled their intention to the Prophet and asked him not to pray there. In fact, this was the first mosque to be destroyed, not by the enemies of Islam but by the Prophet himself. The Qur'ān says:

1. See for example the verses 9:48 and 63:8. For more details refer to books on the history of the life of the Prophet.

> Those who set up a mosque for mischief and disbelief, as well as disunion among believers as an outpost for any one who has warred on God and His messenger, will swear that they have not intended but good. God witnesses that they are certainly liars. (9:107)

In addition to difficulties experienced during the lifetime of the Prophet, his devout followers had to endure much greater difficulties after his demise. They had to protect Islam against threats from external enemies such as the Byzantines as well as those posed by internal enemies. The latter included the hypocrites who had never believed in the Prophet and his message and others who had believed, but did not remain on the right path. This was something that the Qur'ān had warned of:

> Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets. If he dies or gets killed will you turn back on your heels? (3:144)

Many wars and disputes took place after the demise of the Prophet, in which at least one party must have been wrong and acted against the interests of Islam and the values that the Prophet called for. Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Mājah, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and others have narrated that the Prophet said:

> I will be there at the Fountain of *Kawthar* before you, and I will have to contend for some people, but I will have to yield. I will be saying: 'My Lord, they are my Companions, they are my

> Companions', and it will be said: 'You do not know what innovations they made after you."[1]

Bukhārī also narrates that the Prophet said in the company of his Companions:

> I will be at the Fountain waiting for those who will be coming to me from among you. By God, some people will be prevented from coming to me, and I will say: 'My Lord, they are my followers and the people of my *Ummah*'. And God will say: 'You do not know what they did after you; they have been constantly turning back on their heels.'[2]

Despite all the difficulties, thanks to God and the guidance of the Prophet, sincere Muslims have faced no ambiguity in identifying the right path since his demise. The Prophet instructed them to adhere to the Qur'ān and his Household, 'two precious things that will never separate until they meet each other at the Fountain of *Kawthar*' with the Prophet. We will end this discussion with a supplication from Imām 'Ali b. Ḥusayn:

> O God, bless Muḥammad,
> entrusted by Thee with Thy revelation,
> distinguished by Thee among Thy creatures,
> devoted to Thee among Thy servants,

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1. See *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Riqāq, Sakhr serial nos 6096, 6097, 6098 and 6104, Kitāb al-Fitan 6527 and 6528; *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, Kitāb al-Faḍā'il, Sakhr serial nos 4250 and 4259; *Sunan* of al-Nisā'ī, Kitāb al-Iftitaāḥ, Sakhr serial no. 894; *Sunan* of Ibn Mājah, Kitāb al-Manāsik, Sakhr serial no. 3048; *Musnad* of Ahmad, Musnad al-Mukthirīn min al-Ṣaḥābah, nos 2212, 3547, 3621, 3657, etc. .
2. *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Riqāq, Sakhr serial nos 6090 and 6527; *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, Kitāb al-Faḍā'il, no. 4250 and *Musnad* of Ahmad, Musnad al-Mukthirīn min al-Ṣaḥābah, nos 3457, 3621, 3672, 3837, 3966, etc.

the Imām of mercy,
the leader of good,
the key to blessing,
who wearied his soul for Thy affairs,
exposed his body to detested things for Thy sake,
showed open enmity towards his next of kin by summoning to Thee,
fought against his family for Thy good pleasure,
cut the ties of the womb in giving life to Thy religion,
sent far those close because of their denial,
brought near those far because of their response to Thee,
showed friendship to the most distant for Thy sake,
displayed enmity towards the nearest for Thy sake,
made his soul persevere in delivering Thy message,
tired it in summoning to Thy creed,
busied it in counselling those worthy of Thy summons,
migrated to the land of exile and the place of remoteness from
the home of his saddlebags,
the walkway of his feet,
the ground of his birth
and the intimate abode of his soul,
desiring to exalt Thy religion
and seeking help
against those who disbelieved in Thee.[1]

1. *Psalms of Islam*, Second Supplication, pp. 21 and 22.

Divine Justice

All Muslims believe that God is just (*ʿādil*), in that He never commits any injustice towards His servants and never oppresses anyone. This truth is clearly expressed in the Qur'ān:

> God is not in the least unjust to the servants. (3:182 and 8:51 and 22:10)
>
> Your Lord is not in the least unjust to the servants. (41:46)
>
> I am not in the least unjust to the servants. (50:29)
>
> Surely God does not do injustice to the weight of an atom. (4:40)
>
> Surely God does not do any injustice to men, but men are unjust to themselves. (10:44)

In 95:8, the Qur'ān says: 'Is not God the most conclusive of all judges?' Again in 21:47, 'And we have provided a just balance for the Day of Judgement. No soul shall be dealt with unjustly in any way. [Any good deed or evil deed] though it be as small as a grain of the mustard seed, will be brought forth by Us [in testimony]. We suffice as the best of reckoners."[1]

In addition to the importance given to divine justice in the Qur'ān and the ḥadīths, there is a contingent, historical reason for the emphasis placed on this doctrine by the Shīʿa. The Ashʿarites, a group of Sunni theologians, have asserted that there is no objective criterion for distinguishing morally right and wrong acts. Good is

1. There are many more verses in the Qur'ān affirming divine justice.

what God does or commands, so whatever God does or commands is good and just by definition. They believe that if God had asked us to tell lies, telling lies would have become good, and if God were to send pious people to hell, that would be just. They believe of course that God never does such acts, not because they are wrong in themselves, but because He Himself has said that those acts are wrong. Ash'arites also believe that human beings do not have free will and that it is God who creates their acts without their having any role except the 'acquisition' of those acts; men are but receptacles for divine acts.

The Shī'a and some other Sunni theologians such as the Mu'tazilites, believe that good and bad or right and wrong are objective, and that there are rational criteria for moral judgements. In other words, they believe in intrinsic good and intrinsic evil. There is a real and objective difference between, say, justice and oppression, and it is not arbitrarily that God has commanded us to be just and not to oppress anyone, even our enemies. The Mu'tazilites believe further that human beings are free and responsible for their acts by way of *tafwīḍ*, i.e. God has assigned to humans His authority over their volitional acts so that they have complete control over them. The Shī'a, by contrast, while rejecting determinism (*jabr*) as contrary to divine justice and affirming that human beings are free, also believe human freedom to be limited, for God retains authority over their acts. This teaching is expressed in the well-known formulation of Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq:

> There is no compulsion (*jabr*), nor complete delegation of power (*tafwīḍ*); the truth lies between these two.

Because of the ultimate importance of this subject for any value system, the Shī'a have always laid stress on divine justice and have frequently included it, together with the unity of God, prophethood, the Imāmate and resurrection, among the five principles of their school of thought (*Uṣūl al-Madhhab*). By contrast, the unity of God, prophethood and resurrection count as the three principles of religion (*Uṣūl al-Dīn*), for they are shared by all Muslims.

This emphasis on divine justice has influenced not only the theoretical aspect of Shī'ism, for the Shī'a regard justice as such so fundamental an aspect of Islam that they have often called for its implementation in society. Shī'a movements throughout history have frequently been characterized by a call for justice. We will discuss this issue further when reviewing the distinctive characteristics of Shī'i Islam.

The Imāmate

The Shī'a believe in the institution of the Imāmate as a continuation of prophethood. In Arabic the term 'Imām' has the general meaning of 'leader', irrespective of his personal characteristics and the extent of his leadership, which may range from the congregation of a mosque to a whole nation. In Shī'i usage, however, the term acquires a specialized sense as the person placed in charge of all the political and religious affairs of the Islamic nation. More precisely, the Imām is a person appointed by God and nominated first by the Prophet and then by each succeeding Imām, through explicit designation (*naṣṣ*), to lead the Muslim community, to interpret and safeguard both religion and law (*sharī'ah*) and to guide the community in all its concerns. The

Imām is both the representative of God on earth (*khalīfat-ul-lāh*) and the successor of the Prophet. He must be sinless and possess divinely bestowed knowledge of both the exoteric and the esoteric meanings of the Qur'ān.

The Twelver Shī'a who constitute the overwhelming majority of Shī'a Muslims believe that the Prophet was succeeded by twelve Imāms. These are:

1.	Imām 'Ali b. Abī Ṭālib	Died 40/659
2.	Imām Ḥasan b. 'Ali	Died 50/669
3.	Imām Ḥusayn b. 'Ali	Died 61/680
4.	Imām 'Ali b. Ḥusayn, al-Sajjād	Died 95/712
5.	Imām Muḥammad b. 'Ali, al-Bāqir	Died 114/732
6.	Imām Ja'far b. Muḥammad, al-Ṣādiq	Died 148/765
7.	Imām Mūsā b. Ja'far, al-Kāẓim	Died 183/799
8.	Imām 'Ali b. Mūsā, al-Riḍā	Died 203/817
9.	Imām Muḥammad b. 'Ali, al-Jawād	Died 220/835
10.	Imām 'Ali b. Muḥammad, al-Hādī	Died 254/868
11.	Imām Ḥasan b. 'Ali, al-'Askarī	Died 260/872
12.	Imām Muḥammad b. Ḥasan, al-Mahdi	Born 256/868

On the death of his father in 260 AH, al-Mahdi, the Twelfth Imām, went into occultation (*ghaybah*), appearing only to a few leading Shī'a. We will examine the doctrines concerning him later.

The Sunni View

Sunni Muslims use the term 'Imām' in certain contexts as equivalent to the term 'Caliph' (*khalīfah*), the Arabic word for 'successor'. 'Caliph' was used as a title for whoever assumed power

and ruled the Islamic state after the demise of the Prophet Muḥammad. A Caliph may be elected, nominated by his predecessor or selected by a committee, and he may even acquire power through military force. A Caliph need not be sinless, neither does he need to be superior to others in qualities such as faith or knowledge.

It will be appropriate to refer here to a set of traditions in which the Prophet mentions that there will be twelve leaders after him. For example, Bukhārī reports that the Prophet said: 'There will be *twelve leaders* after me.'[1] Then the narrator remarks that the Prophet said something that he could not hear. He asked his father, who was also present at the time, to tell him what the Prophet had said. His father told him that the Prophet had said: 'All these *twelve leaders* will be from the tribe of Quraysh.'[2,3] Muslim also reports this tradition, saying that the narrator of this tradition went with his father to the place where the Prophet was, and the Prophet said: 'This religion will not end until there have been *twelve successors*.'[4] Then the narrator says: 'The Prophet said something I did not understand and I asked my father. He told me that the Prophet had said: "They are all from Quraysh."'[5]

In another tradition, Muslim reports that the Prophet said: 'People's affairs will be properly conducted as long as *twelve men* will lead them.'[6] In yet another tradition he said: 'This religion will be

1. The Arabic term in the original text there for 'leader' is *amīr*.
2. *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Aḥkām, Sakhr serial no. 6682. See also *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhī, Kitāb al-Fitan, Sakhr serial no. 2149 and *Musnad* of Ahmad, Musnad al-Baṣrīyīn, Sakhr serial no. 19920.
3. The Quraysh is the tribe to which the Prophet and his Household and some other families in Mecca belonged. There are separate ḥadīths that stress the fact that those leaders after the prophet are all from Quraysh. For example, there is a chapter in *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim on this issue (Kitāb al-Imārah, Chapter 1).
4. The Arabic term in the original text here for 'successor' is '*khalīfah*'.
5. *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, Kitāb al-Imārah, Sakhr serial no. 3393.
6. Ibid., no. 3394.

exalted as long as there are *twelve successors*'.[1] It is interesting that some versions of the ḥadīth imply that the existence of these twelve will end with that of the world and of Islam. For example, the Prophet said: 'This religion [Islam)] will exist as long as there exist *twelve successors* from the Quraysh.'[2] The meaning seems to be that twelve successors will come after the Prophet and their total lifespans will extend down to the end of time.

This set of traditions raises a number of questions. Who are these twelve people? Who are the successors of the Prophet? How can the lifespans of twelve people extend to the end of time? Who are the sources of exaltation for Islam? And who are the twelve successors all from Quraysh? The Shī'a believe that the answer to all these questions lies in identifying the twelve people mentioned in the traditions as the twelve Imāms. Some non-Shī'a scholars have gone to great lengths to draw up a different list of twelve named individuals. Some wanted to include all Caliphs starting with Abū Bakr, but when they came to Yazīd b. Mu'āwīya, they were obliged to exclude him, for he was the one who killed the grandson of the Prophet and many of his relatives and Companions of the Prophet in 61 AH and assaulted Medina in 62 AH.[3] Another problem they

1. Ibid., nos 3395, 3396 and 3397; *Sunan* of Abū Dāwūd, Kitāb al-Mahdi, Sakhr serial no. 3732; *Musnad* of Ahmad, Musnad al-Baṣrīyīn, Sakhr serial nos 19936, 20019 and 20032.
2. *Sunan* of Abū Dāwūd, Kitāb al-Mahdi, Sakhr serial no. 3731 and *Musnad* of Ahmad, Musnad al-Baṣrīyīn, Sakhr serial nos 19875 and 19901. There are also many ḥadīths that stress the fact that as long as there remain two people on earth there will be one from Quraysh to lead them. See for example *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Aḥkām, Sakhr serial nos 3240 and 6607, *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, Kitāb al-Imārah, Sakhr serial no. 3392, *Musnad* of Ahmad, Musnad al-Mukthirīn min al-Ṣaḥābah, Sakhr serial nos 4600, 5419 and 5847.
3. According to *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhī, Sakhr serial no. 2152 and *Musnad* of Ahamd, Musnad al-Anṣār, Sakhr serial no. 20910, the Prophet said: 'In my nation (*Ummah*) there will be Caliphate for 30 years and then there will be kingdom.' Al-Tirmidhī adds that then the narrator, who was called 'Safīnah', said that the Caliphate of Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Ali lasted for 30 years. Sa'īd, who has narrated this (continued...)

encounter is that when they reach the twelfth candidate on their list, they see there is no great difference between him and a potential thirteenth successor, possessing the same attributes as his predecessors. Efforts of this type have not yielded any satisfactory result.

Infallibility

Muslims typically believe that the prophets were infallible (*ma'ṣūm*) in the affairs relevant to their mission.[1] There have, however, been differences of opinion among the various sects of Islam on the extent and duration of the required infallibility. The Shī'a believe that the prophets never committed sins, major or minor, before or after the beginning of their prophethood, intentionally or unintentionally, whether in matters relevant to their mission or in their personal life. Sunni Muslims generally believe that the prophets were infallible only during their prophethood, and some restrict their infallibility to matters directly pertinent to their message. Ash'arites, for example, confine infallibility to intentional sins, whether minor or major, so that the prophets might have committed some sins unintentionally. The Mu'tazilites believe that the prophets were infallible in relation to major sins, intentionally or unintentionally, but that they might have committed minor sins.

(...continued)

ḥadīth from Safīnah, says that he told Safīnah that the Umayyads thought that they too were Caliphs. But Safīnah replied that they were liars and kings of the worst type.

1. The term '*ma'ṣūm*' is derived from the root *'a-ṣa-ma*. The root literally means to keep, protect or save something, so *ma'ṣūm* literally means a person who is saved or protected. Technically *ma'ṣūm* is the one who has the quality (*'iṣmah*) that prevents him from committing sins or falling into error.

Al-Baghdādī in his *Al-Farq bayn al-Firaq* describes the creed of Sunni Muslims as follows: 'They believe in the infallibility of the prophets in relation to sins. They have construed what is narrated about their lapses as having occurred before their prophethood.'[1] 'Allāmah al-Ḥillī in his *Al-Bāb al-Ḥādī 'Ashar* describes the creed of the Shī'a as follows: 'Truly, the prophets are infallible from the beginning of their lives till the end, because the hearts of the people do not tend to obey those whom they have witnessed previously committing different types of minor and major sins and hateful or unpleasant acts.'[2]

Muslims have argued for the infallibility of the prophets in different ways. The following verse is often adduced: 'And when his Lord tried Abraham with certain words, he fulfilled them. He said: "Surely I will make you an Imām of men." Abraham said: "And of my offspring?" "My covenant does not include the unjust," said He.' (2:124) Although the beginning of the verse concerns the position of Imāmate, the concluding phrase suggests a general rule: to be qualified for any divinely bestowed position one must possess an extraordinary degree of piety and purity of soul. According to the Qur'ān, any breach of religious laws is considered an act of oppression (*ẓulm*). Those who committed sins, especially *shirk* (associating someone with God), the most grievous of all sins, could not therefore have been chosen by God to become a prophet. Those who do not believe in the necessity of infallibility before the onset of prophethood think that it does no harm if a future prophet commits some sin or other, on condition that such conduct then cease.

There are also theological arguments for infallibility, such as that found in the following passage by M. R. Muzaffar:

1. Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, p. 343.
2. Al-Ḥillī, *Bāb al-Ḥādī 'Ashar*, p. 63.

> The reason for the infallibility of a prophet is that if he commits a sin or mistake, or is forgetful or something similar, we have to choose between two alternatives: either we obey his sins and mistakes, in which case, in the view of Islam, we do wrong, or we must not obey his sins and mistakes, which too is wrong, because this is contrary to the idea of prophethood where obedience is necessary; besides, if everything he says or does has the possibility of being either right or wrong, then it is impossible for us to follow him. The result is that the benefit of his mission is lost; it becomes unnecessary, and the prophet becomes like ordinary people whose acts and speech do not have the excellent worth that we seek, with the result that there will be no obedience and his actions will be unreliable.[1]

It has to be noted that the arguments for the infallibility of the prophets differ in their scope and implications, some implying their infallibility throughout their lives and others focusing on their lives after the beginning of prophethood. In what follows, we will try to single out and discuss different aspects of infallibility.

1. Infallibility after the start of prophethood in preaching and delivering the divine message. This is something that all Muslims agree on, for if a prophet makes mistakes or disregards his duties in preaching the divine message, the benefit of delivering the message would be lost and, moreover, people would be misguided by following him.[2]

2. Infallibility after the start of prophethood in personal life, as for example in dealings with family, friends, neighbours and so on.

1. Muzaffar, *The Faith of Shi'a Islam*, p. 21.
2. See for example *'Aqā'id al-Ja'fariyah*, no. 13 by Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (385–460).

Some Muslims regard this type of infallibility as unnecessary with respect to minor sins or those unintentionally committed. The Shī'a and some others believe, however, that this dimension of infallibility is also necessary, because prophets are not simply tutors or propagators; they are designated by God to embody a path of perfection and piety in all their sayings and the entirety of their conduct. People need, moreover, practical examples in addition to theoretical lessons. A prophet who did not embody in his personal life the values that he was preaching would not have fulfilled his mission. He would also weaken his message, because any awareness of shortcomings in his personal life would incline people to think that he himself was not fully convinced of his own mission.

What of unintentional sins or mistakes for which one is usually not held responsible? It seems clear that even in this case many of the same problems would arise. First, people would not always be able to distinguish among intentional and unintentional acts. For example, if they see that a prophet is breaking a law, disregarding someone's rights or is not performing a religious act, it would not always be possible for them to decide whether or not he is mindful of his actions. People who are looking for an excuse to justify their own faults would be particularly prone to fasten on such incidents. Moreover, even if we suppose that people were able in practice to distinguish among intentional and unintentional sins, it is only to be expected that as soon as they saw their prophet to be fallible and to have his own failures and shortcomings, they would lose their trust in him with respect to his preaching and message. If a prophet forgot an appointment or forgot to say his prayer, how could people be certain that he had not made mistakes or

forgotten something in communicating the revealed message? How could people be prepared to entrust their lives and souls to such a person?

It must be admitted, as a matter of reality, that the ordinary believers who constitute the majority of those addressed by the Prophetic mission would not be able to draw the fine distinctions that some theologians suggest. Indeed, many of those same theologians would not be able to draw similar distinctions in their own personal experience, such as the distinction between the truth of what is said and the moral status or intention of the speaker. Most people, even if they are themselves Muslim, would not pay any heed to a skilful and learned preacher who is known to commit immoral acts in his personal life. It follows then that unbelievers who have led a self-indulgent life unchecked by any belief in God would be still less inclined to follow a person of dubious character calling on them to change their life totally, commit themselves to new values and be prepared to undergo sacrifices.

There have, of course, been many pious personalities in the Muslim world, especially among the scholars, who have led lives of exemplary purity. The difference between such people and the prophets is that the prophets' infallibility is all-inclusive, and that unlike the prophets they are not safeguarded from the possibility of sinning.

3. Infallibility before prophethood. In light of the foregoing, it can be understood why the Shī'a believe that the prophets must be infallible before their prophethood as well. Although the prophets were human beings who lived with others and shared their human concerns, they were always outstanding figures

respected by the people and admired even by their enemies. For example, the Prophet of Islam was known as *al-Amīn* ('the trustworthy one') in the pagan society of Mecca, and was a paragon of virtue from his childhood till his death. In fact, the virtuous life of a prophet before the beginning of his prophethood and before people come to believe in him is in a sense more important, for the most challenging time comes when the prophet wants to convince people of his word; if he can be trusted in all other matters, he can credibly ask for their trust with respect to God and religion.

Another reason for the belief in infallibility, applicable both to the period preceding the onset of prophethood and that following it, is that God's choice is not arbitrary. To be addressed by God, to receive revelation and direct and immediate communication from the unseen, is so extraordinarily demanding an experience that it can be borne only by one possessing high spiritual capacity. The Qur'ān says: 'Surely, we will reveal to you some heavy words.' (73:5) None can reach the requisite position if he is tainted by false belief or sin, for sins are harmful to the spirit and to the purity of the soul, even if committed unintentionally. A person committing a sin by mistake may be excused, as for example a person who drinks wine not realizing it be such, but the sin nonetheless has its natural effect upon the soul.

The Shī'a thus hold prophethood in very high esteem. They believe that the prophets were pious and pure throughout their lives and that they were immune from committing sins or other acts deleterious to their spirit or to the trust of the people in them.

What is the True Nature of Infallibility?

On the true nature of infallibility, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, a great Shī'a scholar who was able to reconcile theology (*kalām*) with philosophy, says:

> Infallibility is when the servant [of God] is able to perform sins, but he does not wish to do so at all. And this lack of will [for sins] or the existence of something that prevents him from that is a divine grace for him. So he does not disobey God, not because he is unable to do so, but because he does not will to do so, or because there is something that overrides his will. Thus, considering his power (and free will) it is possible for him to perform sins, but considering his lack of will or the existence of the overriding obstacle, it is impossible.[1]

Al-Ijī, a well-known Ash'arite theologian, explains infallibility as follows:

> For us [the Ash'arites] infallibility is that God does not create in them [the prophets] any sin. For the philosophers, it is a character (*al-malakah*) that prevents one from sinning and is caused by knowing the wretchedness of sins and the merits of obedience to God and is strengthened by the repetition of revelation of commands and prohibitions.[2]

Shī'a theologians and philosophers believe that since prophets are human and must be examples for human beings, in essence it is possible for them to commit sins. The prophets are not like angels

1. Al-Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 525.
2. Al-Ijī, *Al-Mawāqif*, p. 262.

who cannot commit sins. However, the prophets are so pure in their souls, deep in their understandings, insightful in their conduct and mindful of God that neither do they desire to perform immoral acts, nor does it occur to them to commit such gross deeds. Indeed, most of us are infallible in respect to certain acts, such as eating mud, beating our parents, going naked in public or throwing ourselves from the roof. Although we are able to do all the above acts, we have a type of immunity in respect of them, such that it would not even occur to us to do such ridiculous things. This is caused by our self-respect and care, on the one hand, and our clear understanding of the harmfulness and wrongness of those acts, on the other.

The prophets possessed this immunity with respect to all types of sins. They were not even content with their exemption from conventional sins. To them, failure to remember God for a while, even while performing some social duties, was not acceptable. They regarded many acts that are considered as acts of piety and worship for ordinary human beings as insufficient and they asked God for forgiveness when they performed them. It must therefore be noted that what the prophets considered as sins for themselves and for which they asked forgiveness were not sins in the ordinary sense.

Basing themselves on the arguments mentioned above and the clear teachings of the Household of the Prophet, the Shī'a do not endorse any report or narration that suggests the performance of sins or any act by prophets that may make people despise them or distance themselves from them. Shī'a scholars have studied all the verses of the Qur'ān that are sometimes taken to suggest otherwise and have shown that the real interpretation of those verses does not contradict the above idea.[1]

1. In addition to the commentaries on the Qur'ān, independent works have been (continued...)

The Shī'a have the highest estimation for the Prophet Muḥammad and see in all aspects of his character and conduct the most perfect model.

> Surely you have in the Messenger of God an excellent exemplar ... (33:21)

They also believe that the Imāms must enjoy the same quality of infallibility. The reason for this is that the Imāmate is also a divinely bestowed position that requires a high degree of purity and spirituality. No one can reach this position without being completely free from sins and immoral acts. As mentioned above, even many things that are allowed for ordinary people must be eschewed by such people, such as speaking too much, or eating or sleeping more than is necessary. And since people must completely trust them, they must be free from mistakes as well.

In addition to the verse (2:124) that we discussed above, in respect to the Household of the Prophet the Qur'ān says:

> ... God merely wants to remove any uncleanliness from you [since you are] People of the [Prophet's] House, and to cleanse you thoroughly. (33:33)

The Qur'ān clearly asserts that the Household of the Prophet are protected and purified from all types of impurity including sins and bad character. They are free from whatever is disliked by human beings. Freedom from sin is certainly what is meant by the above verse; otherwise there would be no difference between them and other believers who safeguard themselves, as the Qur'ān says:

(...continued)
written on this subject, such as *Tanzīh al-Anbiyā'* by Sayyid al-Murtaḍā.

> Surely the pious, when a visitation from Satan afflicts them they become mindful, then lo they see aright. (7:201)

This verse shows that the pious not only do not deliberately make mistakes but are also not deceived by Satan.

The Doctrine of al-Mahdi

The belief in a saviour figure to come at the end of time is shared by most religions. In Islam, this figure is known as al-Mahdi (the Guided One); he will arise with divine blessing and fill the earth with justice after it was previously filled with injustice and oppression.[1] Summarizing the beliefs of all Muslims about al-Mahdi (AS), Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) writes:

> Let it be known that it is a narrated event by all Muslims in every era, that at the end of time a man from the family of the Prophet will, without fail, make his appearance and will strengthen Islam and spread justice; Muslims will follow him and he will gain domination over the Muslim realm. He will be called al-Mahdi.[2]

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1. There have been many books written by Sunni and Shī'a scholars on al-Mahdi. There are at least 35 prominent Sunni scholars on record who have written 46 books exclusively on the subject. Here are the names of some of these books: *Kitāb al-Mahdi* by Abū Dāwūd; *'Alāmāt al-Mahdī* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī; *Al-Qawl al-Mukhtaṣar fī 'Alāmāt al-Mahdī al-Muntaẓar* by Ibn Ḥajar; *Al-Bayān fī Akhbār Ṣāḥib al-Zamān* by Abu 'Abdillāh b. Muḥammad Yusuf al-Kanjī al-Shāfi'ī; *'Iqd al-Durar fī Akhbār al-Imām al-Muntaẓar* by Shaykh Jamāl al-Dīn Yusuf al-Dimashqī; *Mahī Āl-i Rasūl* by 'Alī b. Sulṭān Muḥammad al-Harawī al-Ḥanafī; *Manāqib al-Mahdī* by al-Ḥāfiẓ Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣbahānī; *Al-Burhān fī 'Alāmāt Mahdī Ākhir al-Zamān* by al-Muttaqī al-Hindī; *Arba'īn Ḥadīth fī al-Mahdī* by 'Abd al-Āla' al-Hamadānī; and *Akhbār al-Mahdī* by al-Ḥāfiẓ Abū Nu'aym. (See *Shi'a Encyclopedia*.)
2. Ibn Khaldūn, *An Introduction to History*, pp. 257–258. It should be noted that Ibn Khaldūn himself was not sympathetic to the idea of al-Mahdi, but still in his (continued...)

The idea of a saviour who will inaugurate a period of justice at the end of time is indicated in many verses of the Qur'ān and ḥadīths. For example, we read in the Qur'ān:

> God has promised to appoint those of you who believe and perform honourable deeds as [His] representatives on earth, just as He made those before them into [such] overlords, and to establish their religion for them which He has approved for them, and to change their fear into confidence. They serve Me [Alone] and do not associate anything else with me ... (24:55)

> We have written in the Psalms the Reminder: 'My honourable servants shall inherit the earth'. (21:105)

> Yet We wanted to endow those who were considered inferior on earth, and make them into leaders and make them [Our] heirs. (28:5)

The following are a few examples of ḥadīths concerning the Mahdi narrated in both Sunni and Shī'i sources:

1. The Prophet said:

> Even if the entire duration of the world's existence has already been exhausted and only one day is left (before the Day of Judgement), God will expand that day to such a length of time as

(...continued)
accurate formulation of the idea he clearly admits all Muslims believe in it.

to accommodate the kingdom of a person from my Household who will be called by my name.'[1]

2. The Prophet also said:

Al-Mahdi is one of us, a member of the Household (*Ahl al-Bayt*). God will prepare for him [his affairs] in one night.[2]

3. Again, he said:

Al-Mahdi will be of my family, of the descendants of Fāṭima.[3]

4. It is also narrated from Jābir b. 'Abdillāh al-Anṣārī that he heard the Messenger of God saying:

A group of my nation will fight for the truth until near the Day of Judgement when Jesus, son of Mary, will descend, and their leader will ask him to lead the prayer, but Jesus will decline, saying: 'No, verily, among you God has made leaders for others in order to honour this nation.'[4]

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1. *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhī, Kitāb al-Fitan, Sakhr serial nos 2156 and 2157 and *Sunan* of Abu Dāwūd, Kitāb al-Mahdī, Sakhr serial nos 3733 and 3734. According to Abū Dāwūd, the ḥadīth has the ending: 'He will fill out the earth with justice as it will have been full of injustice and oppression.' See also *Musnad* of Ahmad, Musnad al-'Asharah al-Mubashsharīn bi al-Jannah, Sakhr serial no. 734 and *Sunan* of Ibn Mājah, Kitāb al-Jihād, Sakhr serial no. 2769.
2. *Sunan* of Ibn Mājah, Kitāb al-Fitan, Sakhr serial no. 4075 and *Musnad* of Ahmad, Musnad al-'Asharah al-Mubashsharīn bi al-Jannah, Sakhr serial no. 610.
3. *Sunan* of Abū Dawūd, Kitāb al-Mahdī, Sakhr serial no. 3735. See also *Sunan* of Ibn Mājah, Kitāb al-Fitan, Sakhr serial no. 4076.
4. *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, Kitāb al-Imān, Sakhr serial no. 225 and *Musnad* of Ahmad, Bāqī Musnad al-Mukthirīn, Sakhr serial nos 14193 and 14595.

It is clear that al-Mahdi is different from Jesus, although they will both come at the same time. Let us note that in the Qur'ān and other Islamic sources *al-Masīḥ*, meaning 'wiped clean, purified', is a title for Jesus. This title bears obvious similarity to the English term 'messiah', applied by Christians to Jesus. However, the word 'messiah' may also be used to refer to the expected king and deliverer of the Jews, or metaphorically to the professed or accepted leader of some group or cause. 'Messiah' has accordingly been used in some English-language writings to refer also to the Mahdi of Islamic belief, but this should not be taken to mean that al-Mahdi is *al-Masīḥ*, a term reserved in Islamic usage for Jesus.

Al-Mahdi will have a universal mission, departing from the Arab lands. His name will be the same as that of the Prophet Muḥammad and he will be from the progeny of Fāṭima. The Shī'a believe that he is the son of Imām Ḥasan al-'Askarī. He was born in 255 (AH). He entered occultation in the year 260 AH. He is still alive and preserved by God in occultation until conditions become ripe for his reappearance. The same is believed by some Sunni scholars, but others among them believe that he has not yet been born. Sayyid Muḥsin al-Amīn in his *A'yān al-Shī'ah* has named thirteen examples of those Sunni scholars who have asserted that al-Mahdi is the son of Imām Ḥasan and has already been born, including Muḥammad b. Yusuf al-Kanjī al-Shāfi'ī in his *Al-Bayān fī Akhbār Ṣāḥib al-Zamān* and *Kifāyat al-Ṭālib fī Manāqib 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib*; Nūr al-Dīn 'Ali b. Muḥammad al-Mālikī in his *Al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah fī Ma'rifat al-A'immah* and Ibn al-Jawzī in his well-known *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*.

In conclusion, we may cite the *fatwā* issued in Mecca by the Muslim World League (*Rābiṭat al-'Ālam al-Islāmī*) on October 11, 1976/ Shawwāl 23, 1396. It states that more than twenty companions narrated traditions concerning al-Mahdi and gives a list of scholars

of ḥadīth who have transmitted these narrations, as well as those scholars who have written books on al-Mahdi. Its text reads in part:

> The memorizers (*Huffāẓ*) and scholars of ḥadīth have verified that there are authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and acceptable (*ḥasan*) reports among the traditions related to al-Mahdi. The majority of these traditions are related through numerous authorities (*mutawātir*). There is no doubt that the status of those reports is *ṣaḥīḥ* and *mutawātir*, that the belief in al-Mahdi is obligatory, and that it is one of the beliefs of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah. Only those ignorant of the Sunnah and innovators in the doctrine deny it.[1]

1. See for example the Introduction to *Al-Bayān* by al-Kanjī al-Shāfi'ī, Beirut, 1399/1979, pp. 76–79.

FOUR

Practices

The main mandatory acts of worship accepted by both Sunni and Shī'a Muslims are the following.

1. *The Daily Prayers*

Every Muslim from the time he or she attains puberty must perform five daily prayers (*ṣalāh*). To be able to start the prayer one must first perform the ritual ablution (*wudū'*) in the prescribed form. Then one stands facing Mecca and resolves an intention to perform the specific prayer of the time in order to attain proximity to God. This intention must be kept in mind all the time during the prayer. If someone at the beginning or later on forgets what he is doing, or prays in order to show off or for any other selfish motive, his prayer becomes void. The actual prayer starts when the person utters: *Allāh-u Akbar* (God is the Greatest). With this he enters the formal state of prayer and he remains in it until the completion of his prayers.

Each prayer consists of two to four units (*rak'ah*).[1] Each unit consists of:

a. the recitation of the opening chapter of the Qur'ān followed by another chapter such as *Tawḥīd* or *Qadr*;[2]

b. bowing down (*rukū'*) and praising and glorifying God in that position;

c. performing two prostrations (*sajdah*) and then praising and glorifying God.

The prayers are ended by bearing witness that God is One and has no partners and that Muḥammad is His servant and messenger with salutations upon him and his Household (*tashahhud*) and offering peace to the Prophet, all the righteous people and all who are engaged in prayers (*taslīm*).

The daily prayer is the most important form of worship and remembrance of the Lord. The Qur'ān says:

> Surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil, and certainly the remembrance of God is the greatest, and God knows what you do. (29:25)

1. The morning prayer (*fajr*), which is performed between dawn and sunrise, consists of two units; the noon (*zuhr*) and afternoon prayers (*'aṣr*) consist of four units; the sunset prayer (*maghrib*) consists of three units and the evening prayer (*'ishā'*) consists of four units.
2. In three-unit and four-unit prayers the third and fourth units consist of recitation of the opening chapter of the Qur'ān or recitation of a specific remembrance (*dhikr*) called '*al-tasbīḥāt al-arba'ah*' (Four Glorifications) and then bowing down and prostrations. In these prayers the affirmation of the oneness of God and the prophethood of the Prophet Muḥammad and salutations upon him and his Household are performed in both the second unit and the last unit after prostrations.

2. *Fasting*

The second act of worship is fasting (*ṣawm*) in the month of Ramaḍan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. In this month every mature Muslim must refrain from eating, drinking and sexual activity from dawn to sunset.[1] Like any other acts of worship, fasting must be performed with a pure intention, that is, it must be performed solely for the sake of God and to attain proximity to Him. Along with closeness to God and achieving His pleasure, there are many other benefits derived from fasting, such as strengthening one's determination, reminding people of God's blessings such as the food that they enjoy every day and which they may take for granted, remembering the hunger and thirst of the Day of Judgement, helping the rich to understand what the poor experience in order to awaken their sense of benevolence and sympathy, weakening one's appetites and desires and elutriating rational understanding and spiritual awareness. In concise fashion, the Qur'ān says:

> O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard [against evil]. (2:183)

3. *Pilgrimage to Mecca*

Every Muslim who has attained puberty, and is financially and physically capable, must once in his lifetime perform the pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj*) in the month of *Dhū al-ḥijjah*, the twelfth month of

1. Several groups of people are exempted, such as the sick or those who are travelling.

the Islamic calendar. In Mecca is situated the most important Mosque for Muslims all over the world, the *Masjid al-Ḥarām*, which encloses the sanctuary of the *Ka'bah*. All Muslims orient themselves towards the Ka'bah in their prayers. The Ka'bah is the cubical construction built by the Prophet Abraham and his son, the Prophet Ishmael, on the foundations of what had originally been built by the Prophet Adam. Indeed, to a great extent, pilgrimage to Mecca is a symbolic reconstruction of what the Prophet Abraham, the primordial monotheist, went though in this very place about four thousand years ago. When Abraham arrived in Mecca after a long journey, he was asked by God to make preparation for people to make pilgrimage to Mecca. The Qur'ān relates the commands he received:

> Do not associate anything with Me, and purify My house for those who circle around it and stand to pray and bow and prostrate themselves. And proclaim the pilgrimage among the people. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel from every remote path, that they may witness the benefits for them and mention the name of God during the appointed days for what He has given them. (22:26–28)

> Most surely the first house appointed for men is the one at *Bekka*, blessed and a guidance for the nations. In it are the clear signs, the standing place of Abraham, and whoever enters it shall be secure, and pilgrimage to the House is incumbent upon men for the sake of God, [upon] everyone who is able to undertake the journey to it; and whoever disbelieves, then surely God is Self-sufficient, above any need of the worlds. (3:98)

Pilgrimage to Mecca is full of unforgettable experiences, the most outstanding of which are perhaps selflessness, brotherhood, equality and simplicity. Every year millions of Muslims from different continents leave their homes, families, businesses and whatever is dear to them, and set out on their journey towards Mecca, a city located in a desert. Everyone is asked to be present there, in the same place at the same time, all wearing the same clothes and performing the same rites. The rich and the poor, the king and the ordinary man, the elite and the commoner, all stand shoulder to shoulder and are simply garbed in two pieces of unstitched white cloth. All of this is something everyone should experience at least once in his lifetime, and then try to implement in his day-to-day life the principles implicit in this experience.

4. Almsgiving

Giving charity is highly recommended in the Qur'ān and Sunnah and the reward for charitable acts is great. Although everything including one's financial possessions belongs to God, the Qur'ān presents giving charity as giving a loan to God:

> Who is the one that lends to God a good loan so that God may give him double? (57:11)

In addition to voluntary charities, there are certain types of charity that are obligatory. For example, one type of almsgiving is *zakāh*, a wealth tax of a small percentage (usually 2.5 per cent). Paying *zakāh* is not making a gift to the poor but a claim they have, which must be fulfilled:

> And in their properties is the right of the beggar and the destitute. (51:19)

Imām 'Ali said:

> God the Glorified has fixed the livelihood of the destitute in the wealth of the rich. Consequently, whenever the destitute remain hungry, it is because some rich persons have denied them their share.[1]

Those whose holdings of wheat, barley, dates, raisins, gold, silver, camels, cows and sheep surpass certain quantities must pay *zakāh* on a yearly basis to the less fortunate amongst their relatives, the orphans, the needy, the wayfarers and others. *Zakāh* may be spent for providing food, shelter, education, health care, orphanages and other public services.

It is noteworthy that in many verses, paying *zakāh* is mentioned next to saying one's prayers as a sign of faith and belief in God. Paying *zakāh* is an act of worship, so it must be performed for the sake of God. Therefore, not only does it help the needy and contribute to the establishment of social justice and development, but it also purifies from miserliness and greed the souls of those who pay it. The Qur'ān says:

> Take alms from their wealth in order to purify and sanctify them. (9:103)

1. *Nahj al-Balāgha* (The Peak of Eloquence).

Khums

Shī'a Muslims also believe in another obligatory tax, called '*khums*'. Khums means one fifth. It is a 20 per cent tax on the excess profit that a person annually makes. At the end of one's financial year, one pays 20 per cent of all one's earnings, after deducting one's household and commercial expenses.[1] The obligation to pay khums has been mentioned in the Qur'ān:

> And know that whatever profit you may attain, one fifth of it is assigned to God and the Messenger, and to the near relatives [of the Messenger] and the orphans, the destitute, and the wayfarer, if you have believed in God and that which We sent down to our servant [Muḥammad]. (8:41)

Sunni Muslims usually believe that the verse refers only to what Muslims acquire in war, i.e. booty.

According to Shī'i jurisprudence, half of the khums belongs to the Twelfth Imām, the last remaining member of the Household of the Prophet and his successor, and the other half to needy descendants of the Prophet, called *sayyids*. Khums must be spent under the supervision of a Shī'a religious authority (*marja' al-taqlid*), i.e. the jurist whom one follows in respect to practical issues. This is to make sure that it is spent in a way pleasing to the Imām Mahdi. The portion belonging to the Imām himself is usually spent on Islamic seminaries and other educational projects such as publishing useful books or building mosques and schools.

1. There are other cases mentioned in Shī'a jurisprudence in which paying khums becomes obligatory. The view cited above is the most common.

5. Struggle for the Sake of God

Every Muslim has to struggle hard and strive for the sake of God in different ways to bring improvements to human life in general and his individual life in particular. The Qur'ān says:

> He has created you upon the Earth and has asked you to cultivate it. (11:61)

To be indifferent to human catastrophes or to be lazy in one's personal life is greatly condemned. By contrast, one who works hard to earn money to spend on his family and improve their living conditions is considered a hero in struggling for the sake of God, a *mujāhid*. An outstanding and vital instance of this struggle (*jihād*) is fighting in order to defend rights and values such as liberty, freedom, justice, dignity and the integrity of the Muslim nation (*Ummah*). The Qur'ān says:

> Permission [to fight] is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully and offensively waged, and surely God is able to give them victory. Those who have been expelled from their homes unjustly, only because they said, 'Our Lord is God . ' (22:39–40)

> And why do you not fight for the sake of God and the utterly oppressed men, women and children who are crying out, 'O Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors, and raise for us from You a protector and raise for us from You a helper.' (4:75)

Jihād also includes more personal cases in which one's family, property or reputation may be endangered, usurped or damaged. According to many ḥadīths, one who is killed while defending his family or land is considered the same as a soldier who is martyred at the warfront.

Jihād must continue until justice is achieved. The Qur'ān says: 'Fight against aggressors until oppression is stopped.' (2:193) On a larger scale, of course, a battle has been continuously always fought from the dawn of creation of mankind, a battle between good and evil, truth and falsehood, the party of God and the party of Satan. This battle will continue until the end of time when the earth will be filled with justice and equity, under the auspices of al-Mahdi.

Whether it be waged with the pen, the tongue, a weapon or any other means, jihād is an act of worship, and it must be performed with pure intention, i.e. for the sake of God and for the attainment of justice. It is not permitted to fight or struggle for materialistic ends, for personal glory or the glory of any tribe, race or nation, for occupying the land of others in order to become richer or more powerful. Indeed, jihād first of all starts within the self of the *mujāhid* (the one who struggles). To make sure that one can win the external battle against evil, one has to fight first against his own baser desires and lusts, and must first liberate his own heart from satanic occupation in order to regain the dignity and honour that God Almighty has bestowed on human beings. The Qur'ān says:

> O soul at peace, return to your Lord, well-pleased [with Him], well-pleasing [Him]. So enter among My true servants and enter into My Paradise! (89:27–30)

According to a well-known ḥadīth, once the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him and his family) said to a group of his Companions who had won a battle: 'Well done. Welcome to the people who have completed the lesser jihād (*al-jihād al-asghar*) and on whom the greater jihād (*al-jihād al-akbar*) remains incumbent.' Astonished, the Companions, who had defeated the enemies and had been prepared to sacrifice their lives in defence of Islam, asked: 'What is the greater jihād?' The Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him and his family) replied: 'The greater jihād is to fight against your own selves [or your souls]'. Thus, to resist temptation, to prohibit one's soul from wrongdoing and to purify oneself constitute is the greatest and the most difficult jihād.

To conclude, let us refer to some of the merits of those who struggle for the sake of God as expounded by God Himself:

> Those who believe, and have left their homes and strive hard with their wealth and their lives in God's way, are much higher in rank with God. These are they who are triumphant. Their Lord gives them good tidings of mercy from Him, and acceptance, and Gardens where enduring pleasures will be theirs. There they will abide forever. Surely with God there is a Mighty reward. (9:20–22)

6. *Enjoining the Good and Prohibiting the Evil*

Enjoining the good (*al-amr bi al-ma'rūf*) and prohibiting the evil (*al-nahy 'an al-munkar*) are two acts of worship that every mature Muslim has to perform whenever applicable. No Muslim can be indifferent to what happens in the world around him. Part of the

social responsibilities of each individual Muslim is to observe human and religious values, and whenever any of them is deliberately overlooked or violated he must advise and direct those responsible towards performing the good and abandoning evil and sinful acts. (3:103, 109, 113; 7:199; 9:71, 112; 22:41)

FIVE

General Characteristics of Islam and Shī'ism

A proper way of looking at Islam is to consider it as a *system*. Islam is not just a set of scattered beliefs and practices, nor a number of formalities lacking a unifying spirit. It is rather a complete system revealed by God to provide direction for all aspects of human life, throughout the ages and under different conditions. Islam is a system in that it possesses all the elements required to meet the needs of mankind in its universality and entirety. Islam has clearly established ideals and the theoretical and practical means needed to achieve them. The ability of Islam to cope with a very wide range of challenges and difficulties in all different ages and to make steady progress under various cultural, social, economic and practical conditions without losing its identity and integrity is a good sign of the remarkable efficacy of the Islamic system of thought. Muslims are the first to admit that the reason for this success and strength lies in Islam itself and not in themselves or their rulers. In what follows, I will refer to three main characteristics of Islam from the Shī'a viewpoint or, to express it differently, three main characteristics of Shī'i Islam: spirituality, rationality and the search

for justice. Naturally, there are others that should also ideally be studied, such as dynamism, encouragement of the arts, sciences and other aspects of civilization, and comprehensiveness.

Spirituality

Islam urges its followers to go beyond the material affairs of daily life and to seek out the real nature of human existence with its connections to the unseen world and the spiritual world. In a fragment of poetry attributed to Imām 'Ali, stress is laid on the greatness of the spiritual world that mankind conceals within itself:

> The cure is with you, but you do not see,
> And the illness is from you, but you are unaware.
> You are the clear book whose
> Letters make manifest the hidden.
> Do you think you are some small mass
> While within you there dwells the greatest world?[1]

In Islam, belief in resurrection and another world is an ever-present reality linked with one's approach to this life, not something irrelevant to it and located in the distant future. Alluding to this, the Qur'ān says:

> And they know only the apparent aspect of the life in this world and they neglect the hereafter. (30:7)

1. *Insān-e Kāmel* by Muṭahharī, p. 203.

The Qur'ān invites human beings to investigate the spiritual world within themselves as an entrance to the world of spirituality:

> We will soon show them Our signs in the horizons and in their own souls, until it becomes clear to them that it is the Truth. (41:35)

> And there are signs on the earth for those who are certain. And in your own souls [too]; will you not then see? (51:20, 21)

In a well-known ḥadīth, the Prophet Muḥammad formulates as follows the relationship between one's knowledge of one's *self* to one's knowledge of God:

> Whoever knows himself [or his soul] knows his Lord.[1]

The obverse of this relationship, i.e. the relationship of one's knowledge of God to one's knowledge of one's self, is referred to directly in the Qur'ān:

> And be not like those who forgot God, so He made them forget their own souls; these it is that are the transgressors. (59:19)

Therefore, the knowledge of the most valuable being according to any religion, i.e. God, is linked to one's knowledge of one's own reality, which by no means can be identified with the physical aspect of humanity, the body.[2] It also has to be noted that the mere

1. Majlesī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. 2, p. 32, no. 22 and Vol. 95, p. 456, no. 1.
2. It is a clear Qur'ānic principle backed up by many philosophical arguments that the reality of man is his spirit and not his material body. See for example M. A. Shomali, *Self-Knowledge*, Chs 2 and 3.

knowledge of one's self is not sufficient. Having known the reality of the self, one has to take care of it by educating, training and purifying it. The process of cultivating spirituality can be summed up as follows:

1. attention to one's self (in contrast to negligence and immersion in material life);

2. knowing one's self, including its reality, faculties, potentialities and what benefits or harms it;

3. taking care of one's self.[1]

The process of taking care of one's self involves:

a. acquiring appropriate beliefs and faith;
b. refraining from evil deeds and performing acts of piety;
c. acquiring good characteristics and removing evil ones;
d. continuing the spiritual journey until one becomes a true servant who meets his Lord.[2]

Based on the teachings of the Qur'ān and the ḥadīths of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Household, Islam possesses an

1. The Qur'ān says: '*O you who believe! Take care of yourselves (or your souls); he who goes astray does not harm you when you are on the right path.*' (5:105)
   Imām 'Ali says: 'Whenever the knowledge of a man increases, his attention to his soul also increases and he does his best to train and purify it.' (*Mustadrak al-Wasā'il* by Nūrī, Vol. 11, p. 323, no. 16).
2. 'Meeting God' (*liqā'-ul-lāh*) is a profound expression in Islamic mysticism. The expression has its root in the Qur'ān. For example, the Qur'ān says: 'Anyone who is expecting to meet his Lord should perform good deeds and not associate anyone in the worship due his Lord.' (18:110) Of course, it is clear that it is not a physical meeting.

extremely rich heritage of spirituality built around the above elements. Whoever wishes to familiarize himself with Islamic spirituality must also know that it is a full-fledged system, penetrating all aspects of life. In Islam everything is devised in order to serve the spirituality of man and to facilitate his proximity to God, from religious practices such as praying and fasting to the social system such as Islamic economics, politics and judicial laws. A sample number of the sayings and supplications of the Prophet and his Household regarding the fruits of the spiritual journey and the process of attaining nearness to and meeting God will now be presented.[1]

Complete Support by God

In a famous ḥadīth, the Prophet reports that he asked God about the status of the believers, and God's answer included the following:

> None of My servants can seek proximity to Me by that which is dearer to Me than things that I have made *wājib* [obligatory] to him. Then, with the performance of *nawāfil* [the recommended acts], he continuously attains proximity to Me, so that I love him. When I love him, I will be the ear with which he hears, the eyes with which he sees, and the hand with which he strikes. If he calls Me, I will answer his call, and if he makes a request, I will grant it.[2]

1. In addition to what follows in the text, the approximation to God has other outcomes on both the individual and the social planes, such as peace, confidence, happiness, certainty and material blessings. Those mentioned in the text are singled out because of their importance and centrality. For a discussion on some of the results of closeness to God, see Shomali, 1996, pp. 148–158.
2. *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, Vol. 2, pp. 352 and 353.

Perfect Knowledge

There are many ḥadīths that indicate that one of the consequences of having attained spiritual nearness to God is to be endowed with great knowledge of the realities of the world, including many mysteries that can never be known through ordinary methods of learning and teaching. Again the Prophet reports God as saying with regard to the servant who has attained proximity to Him:

> I will love him when he loves Me and I will make him loved by My creation, and I will open up his inward eyes to My glory and grandeur, and I will not hide from him [the knowledge of] the select of My creation. So in the darkness of night and in the light of day, I will tell him secrets, so that his conversations with creatures and with his companions will be cut off. I will make him hear My words and the words of My angels and I will reveal to him the secret I have hidden from My creation.[1]

Exclusive Devotion to God

To be cut off from anything other than God means to be free from any reliance on anything other than God, and to see everything as His sign and as a manifestation of His power and grace. The true servants of God live within society while remaining totally mindful of God, and they remember Him continuously. The Qur'ān praises a group of people 'whom neither business nor trading distract from remembering God, keeping up prayer and paying the *zakāh*'. (24:37) Imām 'Ali and other members of the household of the Prophet called upon God, saying:

1. *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. 77, pp. 28 and 29.

> My God! Make me completely cut off from all else but You, and enlighten the vision of our hearts with the radiance of looking at You, until the vision of our hearts penetrates the veils of light and reaches the Source of Grandeur and sets our spirit to be suspended at the glory of Your sanctity.[1]

Entrance to the Realm of Light

The above ḥadīths and many others refer to the fact that one of the consequences of progress on the spiritual journey is the elimination of darkness and entrance into the realm of light. This fact is clearly expressed by the Qur'ān.[2]

Immense Love for God

The mystic is not the one who loves God; rather he is the one who loves God alone, because his love or hatred for anything else is for the sake of God only. He wills and desires only what his Beloved wills and desires. He has no will or desire other than His. The mystic's love for God permeates his love for anything else.[3] Imām Ṣādiq says:

> The pure heart is the one that meets its Lord while it is free from anyone else.

Nothing short of reaching God can satisfy the spiritual wayfarer. The Qur'ān says:

1. 'Al-Munājāt al-Sha'bānīyah' in *Mafātiḥ al-Jinān*.
2. See for example the verses 2:257 and 5:16. The realm of light is an important topic in Islamic philosophy and mysticism.
3. For a detailed account of love, see *Love in Christianity and Islam* (2002) by M. Heydarpoor.

Surely! With the remembrance of God hearts come to rest. (13:28)

Imām 'Ali b. Ḥusayn says:

Nothing will cool my burning thirst, but reaching You; quench my ardour but meeting You; dampen my yearning, but gazing upon Your face; settle me in my settling place without closeness to You.[1]

Witnessing God in Everything

The mystic is the one who witnesses God in everything. Imām Ḥusayn says:

O my God! Through the variety of Your signs (in the world of being) and the changes in states and conditions, I realized that the purpose is to make Yourself known to me in everything, so that I would not ignore You in anything.[2]

Imām 'Ali says:

I saw nothing except that I saw God before it, with it and after it.[3]

It is obvious that the vision in question, for God, the Almighty, is infinitely exalted beyond the range of the physical eye. The Shī'a unanimously believe that God cannot be seen by the physical eye, either in this world or in the hereafter.

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1. *The Psalms of Islam*, pp. 251 and 252.
2. 'The Prayer of 'Arafah' in *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*.
3. Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *Al-Asfār*, Vol. 1, p. 117, Vol. 4, p. 479 and Vol. 5, p. 27.

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that Islamic spirituality is perfectly God-centred. The value of man, the subject of this journey and the best of God's creation, is defined by the place that he occupies on the path towards God, by the degree that he is either distant from Him or close to Him.

Supplication

One of the manifestations of spirituality in Shī'i Islam is supplication (*du'ā*), a practice much emphasized in the Qur'ān and the ḥadīths of the Prophet and his Household. For example, the Qur'ān says:

> Say: My Lord will not pay any attention to you, if you do not pray. (25:77)
>
> If My servant asks you about Me [tell them:] surely I am near. I answer the call of the caller when he calls Me. (2:186)
>
> Call Me! I will answer to You. (40:60)

The Prophet Muḥammad said:

> Supplication is the weapon of the believer and the pillar of faith.

The Imāms of the Household of the Prophet said:

> The best type of worship is supplication.
>
> Supplication is the core of worship.

Surely supplication is the cure for all types of illness.

Many sayings of the Household of the Prophet discuss different aspects of supplication, such as its meaning and purpose, instructions on how and when to make supplication, and the obstacles to supplications being answered. In addition, there are many short and long texts of supplication narrated from the Imāms of the Household of the Prophet contained in Shī'a sources. Many volumes have in turn been written by Shī'a scholars by way of commentary on those texts.

The best-known collection of supplications in Islam as a whole is *Al-Ṣaḥīfat al-Sajjādīyah* composed by Imām 'Ali b. Ḥusayn.[1] This book is a masterpiece of Islamic spirituality that includes profound theological, philosophical and psychological facts as well.[2] What has

1. This book has been translated into English more than once. The best translation is that made by William Chittick under the title *The Psalms of Islam*.
2. *Al-Ṣaḥīifa Al-Kāmila Al-Sajjādīya* is made up of 54 Supplications, as follows:

   - In Praise of God
   - Blessings upon Muḥammad and his Household
   - Blessings upon the Bearers of the Throne
   - Blessing upon the Attesters of the Throne
   - His Supplication for himself and his Special Friends
   - His Supplication in the Morning and Evening
   - His Supplication in Worrisome Tasks
   - His Supplication in Seeking Refuge
   - His Supplication in Yearning
   - His Supplication in Seeking Asylum with God
   - His Supplication for Good Outcomes
   - His Supplication in Confession
   - His Supplication in Seeking Needs
   - His Supplication in Acts of Wrongdoing
   - His Supplication when Sick
   - His Supplication in Asking for Release from Sins
   - His Supplication against Satan
   - His Supplication in Perils
   - His Supplication in Asking for Rain during a Drought
   - His Supplication on Noble Moral Traits

(continued...)

added to the significance of this book is that all those supplications belong to one of the most critical times in the early history of Islam, i.e. the period after the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn, the grandson of the Prophet, and 72 of his family members and followers. Imām 'Ali b. Ḥusayn (the son of Imām, also known as *Zayn al-'Ābidīn*, 'the adornment of the worshippers') had been seriously ill during the events at *Karbalā'* (61 AH), and he was taken captive along with Zaynab, the granddaughter of the Prophet, and other women and

(...continued)

- His Supplication when Something Made him Sorrowful
- His Supplication in Hardship
- His Supplication for Well-Being
- His Supplication for his Parents
- His Supplication for his Children
- His Supplication for his Neighbours and Friends
- His Supplication for the People of the Frontiers
- His Supplication in Fleeing
- His Supplication when his Provision was Stinted
- His Supplication for Help in Repaying Debt
- His Supplication in Repentance.
- His Supplication in the Night Prayer
- His Supplication in Asking for the Best
- His Supplication when Afflicted
- His Supplication in Satisfaction with the Decree of God
- His Supplication upon Hearing Thunder
- His Supplication in Giving Thanks
- His Supplication in Asking for Pardon
- His Supplication in Seeking Pardon
- His Supplication when Death Was Mentioned
- His Supplication in Asking for Covering and Protection
- His Supplication upon Completing a Reading of the Qur'ān
- His Supplication when he Looked at the New Crescent Moon
- His Supplication for the Coming of the Month of Ramadan
- His Supplication in Bidding Farewell to the Month of Ramadan
- His Supplication for the Day of Fast-Breaking and Friday
- His Supplication on Day of 'Arafah
- His Supplication on the Day of Sacrifice and Friday
- His Supplication in Repelling the Trickery of Enemies
- His Supplication in Fear
- His Supplication in Pleading and Abasement
- His Supplication in Imploring
- His Supplication in Abasing himself
- His Supplication for the Removal of Worries

children of his family. From his eventual release until the end of his life or, more precisely, until his martyrdom, the Imām and his followers were subjected to confinement and surveillance. Under these circumstances, composing texts of supplication served as an appropriate means for communicating pure Islamic teachings and spirituality. One can again see how spirituality in Islam is interwoven with social responsibilities; a true Muslim in his most private moments of prayer cannot neglect what is happening around him or overlook his social responsibilities.

Rationality

One of the most important issues in religious studies and in the philosophy of religion is to define the role of reason and its relation to revelation. As we have seen, Islam regards reason as one of the greatest blessings bestowed by God on human beings. It is by means of reason that we understand ourselves and the world around us. It is by means of reason that we realize the necessity of investigating our origin and the One who has created us. If we had no reason, we would not be liable for our acts or beliefs. In Shī'i Islam in particular, great emphasis has always been placed on reason and the rational sciences. This emphasis derives from the Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet and the Imāms of his household. The Qur'ān says in several verses:

> Surely there are signs in this for those who ponder. (13:4; 16:12; 30:24)

The Qur'ān also condemns more than once those who do not think or use their reason. The following two traditions, selected from the large number of ḥadīths available on the subject, show the place of reason in Shī'a belief. Imām Ṣādiq says:

> Whoever has intellect has faith and whoever has faith will enter Paradise.[1]

With reason one comes to understand the truth, to believe in Islam and follow the teachings of the Prophet, and consequently one will be able to enter Paradise. In an insightful ḥadīth addressing one of his companions, Hishām b. Ḥakam, Imām Mūsā Kāẓim said:

> With reason God completes His proof. God has equipped His prophets with the ability of expressing their ideas in a way that all people can understand. God showed people His lordship through reasons. Then the Imām recited this verse of the Glorious Qur'ān: 'Your God is the One God, there is no god but God who is the Compassionate the Merciful ... Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alternation of days and night, and in the ships that move in the sea, and in the rain that descends from the sky to bring life on the earth, and all kinds of animals that God has spread over the earth, and also in the movement of the wind and the clouds which God has kept between the earth and the sky – in all these there are signs for those who are thoughtful.' Then the Imām said: 'Allah has made these signs a proof to show people that they have a Creator Who arranges everything for them and Who directs everything, because

1. *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, Vol. 1, p. 11.

God then says 'surely there are signs in these facts for those who use their reason'.[1]

Many other references to the Qur'ān are made in this tradition, which shows that God in His final message considers reason as the only means by which human beings become responsible and come to understand the truth. All questions on the Day of Judgement are proportionate to the rational capacity of people. Those who have been given greater intelligence will be questioned more deeply than ordinary people.

One of the key functions of reason is to direct us towards the truth of religion. The Shī'a believe that the exercise of reason is the only way a person can come to understand that God exists, that He has sent certain people as His messengers and that resurrection will take place. Indeed, it is obligatory for every Muslim to examine and question his beliefs until he attains certainty, and to be able to support his beliefs with valid logical arguments. Muslims are not allowed to say that they believe in God for no particular reason or call themselves Muslim simply because their parents are Muslim or because they were born in a Muslim community. Faith is a matter of reasoning, not of imitation. Everyone is advised to secure his faith with sound arguments. In this way, one can have complete confidence in his belief, and nothing can cause him to doubt it.

Another issue that arises in connection with the function of reason is in understanding moral good and bad or what is right and wrong.[2] This has been an important topic of concern for all religious traditions, especially Christianity and Islam. According to

1. Ibid., p. 13.
2. It has to be noted that the reason here includes what is usually known as moral conscience. For a more detailed explanation, see Muslim philosophers' discussion about practical reason or practical wisdom.

the 'Divine Command Theory', 'good' or 'morally right' means 'commanded by God', and 'bad' or 'morally wrong' means 'forbidden by God.'[1] On the other hand, some theologians have also argued for a rational approach to ethics. They believed that there are independent criteria of good and bad that can be understood by our reason. In other words, the religious believer does not have exclusive access to moral truth; God has made all people rational. For both believer and non-believer, making a reasonable moral judgement is a matter of listening to reason and following it. God's commands are not arbitrary and we can exercise rational methods to discover moral norms. Among Muslim theologians, the Ash'arites held the former view, and the Mu'tazilites and Shī'a held the latter.[2]

According to the Ash'arites, all values are determined by the will of God, and moral concepts such as 'good' and 'right' have no meaning other than 'what God wills' or 'what is commanded by God'. The words 'good' and 'right' have no objective meaning. According to Shī'a and Mu'tazilites, however, values such as justice and goodness do possess a real existence, independent of anyone's will, even God's, since values are objective.

Based on the above issue, another controversy arose concerning the question of whether good and evil are perceived rationally (*al-ḥusn wa'l-qubḥ al-'aqliyān*) or through revelation. The Shi'a and the Mu'tazilites believed that good and evil are objective and therefore

1. In this regard, George Hourani says: 'It [Ash'arite view, or what he calls 'theistic subjectivism', or what others have called 'ethical voluntarism'] is not peculiar to Islam, since it occurs in medieval Judaism and occasionally in Western thought; but it was probably more prominent and widespread in Islam than in any other civilization.' (*Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics, p. 57)*
2. Despite some differences between the Shī'a and the Mu'tazilites, they are both called *ahl al-'adl* ('the people of justice'), for they all believe in independent moral values and in the existence of rational criteria for judging what is good and what is bad, and actively defend the principle of divine justice, depending on their belief in independent and rational standards of good and bad.

can be known rationally. 'Allamah al-Ḥillī, a great Shī'a scholar, in his comments on *Al-Yāqūt* by al-Nawbakhtī, writes:

> The principle on which the problems concerning justice depend is that God is All-Wise; He never commits an evil action, nor does He fail to perform any obligatory (*wājib*) action. When this principle is proved, questions concerning justice, such as the goodness of obligation (*taklīf*), the necessity of grace (*lutf*) and the like are constructed upon it. And since this principle depends on the knowledge of good and evil and their rationality, the author [i.e. al-Nawbakhtī]) started his discussion with these.[1]

Elsewhere he writes:

> Imāmites and their followers, the Mu'tazilites, believe that the goodness and evilness of some actions are known by reason evidently, such as our knowledge of the goodness or benefit of telling the truth or evilness of harmful lies, which no reasonable person doubts, and his certainty about this is no weaker than his certainty about the need of a contingent being [in its existence] for a cause or about the equality of two things that are each equal to a third thing. They believe that there are some actions the goodness or evil of which may be perceived through reflection, such as the goodness of telling the harmful truth and the evil of beneficial lies, and finally that there are some actions on which reason is unable to make judgement, and their goodness or evil is to be declared by the religious law (*Shar'*), such as [how to perform] acts of worship.[2]

1. Al-Ḥillī, p. 104.
2. Al-Ḥillī, p. 82.

On the other hand, the Ash'arites deny the rationality of goodness and evil altogether. Shahrestānī in his *Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* describes their view as follows:

> All obligations are to be learnt from revelation. Reason (*al-'aql*) does not make anything obligatory and does not make anything deserve to be considered good or bad. Thus, knowing God becomes possible by reason and becomes obligatory (*wājib*) by scripture (*sam'*). God, the Most High, says: 'We have never chastised unless We have despatched some messenger.' (The Qur'ān, 17:15) Similarly, gratitude to the blessing-giver, rewarding the obedient and punishing the disobedient become obligatory (*wājib*) by revelation and not by reason.'

By contrast, the Shī'a and the Mu'tazilites have argued that we have been given the power to understand what is good and what is evil. Even those who do not believe in any religion understand at least basic moral values and are therefore morally responsible. If goodness and evil were determined only by religion and not conceivable by reason, unbelievers would not recognize them today or in advance of becoming acquainted with revelation. But we know that there are many values and moral principles shared by theists and atheists. 'Abd al-Jabbār, a great Mu'tazilite theologian, says: 'Any sane person knows his obligations even though he does not know that there is a Commander and Forbidder.'[2]

The Shī'a and the Mu'tazilites have also argued that if we did not have such independent understanding, we could not decide on the veracity of the claims made by the prophets, because one might think it possible for God give miraculous powers to false prophets.

1. Al-Shahrestānī, Vol. 1, p. 115.
2. 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī fī al-Tawḥīd wa al-'Adl*, Vol. I, p. 45.

It is our reason which tells us that misleading people is wrong and that God, the Wise, the Merciful, Who is rationally proven to exist, is known never to do anything wrong. It would be circular to say to those who have not yet found the truth of religion that God never misleads, because He Himself or the Qur'ān has proclaimed this to be the case.

The Qur'ān itself in fact implies in many statements that the knowledge of what is obligatory, good and evil is accessible to everyone: 'Surely God bids to justice and good-doing and giving to kinsmen, and He forbids indecency, dishonour and insolence.' (16:92) These virtues and vices must have been recognized as such prior to revelation. The objectivity of ethical values is asserted throughout the Qur'ān. For instance, the repeated commands of God to do what is right would be empty of force and spirit, if all they meant was 'to do what He commands you to do'. It would be even harder to make sense of statements that God is always just to His servants on the supposition that 'just' means 'commanded by God'.

None of this means, of course, that humans are not in need of religious guidance. The argument is rather that in order to benefit fully from religious guidance, humans have been endowed with reason, and it is only when they are thoughtful and rational that they can comprehend revelation. The truth of religion and the principles of morality are understood by reason, but there is much more to be learnt from revelation. According to Shī'a thinkers, religion can provide us with a fuller and more comprehensive account of morality, and moreover motivates us to observe moral requirements.

On the place of intellectual sciences among the Shī'a, Yann Richard writes:

> Today, however, one of the originalities of Shī'ite Islam is to recognize that metaphysical speculation and philosophical discourse have a certain place in religious knowledge. The Centre for Theological Studies at Qom [Qum] is certainly the only place of Islamic studies in the world where one dares comment on the philosophical treatises of Aristotle or Avicenna, and where the post-Platonic philosophical tradition has remained alive. Ayatollah Khomeini was known at Qom up till the beginning of the 1950s for his philosophy course.[1]

On the continuity and development of the philosophical tradition, S. M. H. Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1892–1981), himself the most celebrated contemporary master of Islamic philosophy, writes:

> In the same way that from the beginning Shī'ism played an effective role in the formation of Islamic philosophical thought, it was also a principal factor in the further development and propagation of philosophy and the Islamic sciences ... In the same manner, in the other intellectual sciences, there appeared many outstanding figures such as Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (who was both philosopher and mathematician) and Birjandī, who was also an outstanding mathematician.
>
> All the sciences, particularly metaphysics or theosophy (*falsafah-i ilāhī* or *ḥikmat-i ilāhī*), made major advances thanks to the indefatigable endeavour of Shī'ite scholars. This fact can be seen if one compares the works of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, Shams al-Dīn Turkah, Mir Dāmād and Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī with the writings of those who came before them.[2]

1. Richard, p. 61.
2. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Shī'ite Islam*, Part II, 'Outstanding Intellectual Figures of Shī'ism'.

The Search for Justice

One of the principal doctrines of Shī'a Islam is justice. God is just and never does anything unjust or contrary to the criteria of justice. Divine justice is known by reason and confirmed by revelation. The Qur'ān says:

> We shall set up scales for justice on Resurrection Day, and no soul will be dealt with unjustly in any way. (21:47)

God treats human beings with justice and wants them to deal with each other justly and establish justice in society. The issue of divine justice is not merely theological, for it has clear and significant practical implications. All the prophets were sent to establish social justice:

> We have sent Our messengers with explanation, and sent the Book and the Balance down along with them, so that mankind may conduct themselves with all fairness. (57:25)

> Surely God commands justice, benevolence and giving to the kindred. (16:90)

It is a duty for everyone to implement justice in both his individual and his social life. A Muslim is one who is just to himself,[1] to his spouse and children[2] and to everybody else,

1. In the Islamic worldview, whoever disobeys God has oppressed himself. The Qur'ān says: '*whoever breaks Divine laws has oppressed himself*.'(65:1)
2. According to a ḥadīth, to which there are many similar: 'There is nothing that angers God more than the oppression of women and children '.

including his enemies.[1] According to Shī'a jurisprudence, there are many religious or socio-political positions that require the position holder to be just. For example, those who lead the congregational or Friday prayers, witnesses, judges, religious authorities and statesmen all must be just.

In Islam, the government is envisaged as an irreplaceable means of establishing and safeguarding social justice. A just society can be maintained only by fair distribution of power and wealth. The following are some ḥadīths relevant to this issue from the Prophet and his Household.

1. In the year of the Conquest of Mecca a woman from a wealthy and affluent family committed a theft. The Prophet decided to punish her. Members of her family and other people went to the Prophet and asked for her to be exempted. The Prophet did not accept their pleas and gathered the people together, saying that the previous nations had perished because they had discriminated against the poor and lower class people.

2. Explaining why he accepted the Caliphate after the death of the third Caliph, Imām 'Ali says:

> Behold, by Him who split the grain [to grow] and created living beings, if people had not come to me and supporters had not exhausted the argument, and if there had been no pledge of Allāh with the learned to the effect that they should not acquiesce in the gluttony of the oppressor and the hunger of the oppressed, I would have cast the rope of Caliphate on

1. Muslims are required to deal justly and fairly even with their enemies. The Qur'ān says: 'Do not let your hostility towards some people make you unjust. Be just. Justice is closer to piety.'(5:8)

its own shoulders, and would have given the last one the same treatment as the first. Then you would have seen that, in my view, this world of yours is no better than the sneezing of a goat.[1]

3. Describing his plans and policies to reform the previously unjust distribution of resources, Imām 'Ali said that he would return all usurped possessions to the public treasury and to their real owners:

   By Allāh, even if I find that by such money women have been married or slave women have been purchased, I will reclaim it because there is a wide scope in the dispensation of justice, and he who finds it hard to act justly will find it harder to deal with injustice.[2]

4. Once Imām 'Ali saw a necklace on the neck of his daughter. He asked where it came from. She replied that she had borrowed it from the treasury. Imām summoned the treasurer and asked him why he had given her the necklace. He replied that it was a registered loan. Then Imām released him and said that if it had been otherwise, he would have certainly cut off the fingers of his daughter.

According to Islam, rulers must be just in their individual lives as well as in their social lives. They must fulfil all their personal duties as well as their social responsibilities, including respect for the rights of their citizens. They must observe justice in both personal and administrative affairs. They must in addition establish

1. *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 3.
2. Ibid., Sermon 15.

social justice and make sure that neither their agents nor ordinary citizens violate standards of justice. Imām 'Ali said:

> If I had so wanted, I could have very easily found ways and means to provide for myself the purest honey, the best variety of wheat and the finest silk clothes that could be woven. But inordinate cravings cannot overcome me and greediness cannot persuade me to acquire the best provisions, when in the Ḥijāz and Yemen there may be people who have no hope of obtaining a piece of bread and who have never satisfied their hunger fully. I cannot satiate myself when there are people around me whom hunger and thirst keep restless and agonized. Do you want me to be like that person about whom somebody has very aptly said, 'Is this disease not enough for you that you keep on sleeping with your stomach full, and around you there are such starving mouths that will greedily eat even dried goatskin'?[1]

Imām 'Ali also said:

> Certainly, Allāh, the Sublime, has made it obligatory on true leaders that they maintain themselves at the level of the humble so that the poor do not cry out over their poverty.[2]

One of the features of a proper political system in Islam is that people should be able to protest against any breach of Islamic laws or violation of human rights. In his letter to the newly appointed governor of Egypt, Mālik al-Ashtar, Imām 'Ali writes:

1. Ibid., Letter 45.
2. Ibid., Sermon 208.

> Out of your hours of work, fix a time for the dissatisfied and for those who want to approach you with their grievances. During this time you should do no other work but hear them and pay attention to their complaints and grievances. For this purpose you must arrange a public audience for them, during which, for the sake of Allah, you must treat them with kindness, courtesy and respect. Do not let your army and police be in the audience hall at such times so that those who have grievances against your rule may speak to you freely, unreservedly and without fear.
>
> All this is a necessary factor of your rule because I have often heard the Prophet(s) saying: 'A nation or government where the rights of the depressed, destitute and suppressed are not observed and where the mighty and powerful persons are not forced to grant them their rights cannot achieve salvation."[1]

Muslims must not be indifferent towards wrong acts and unjust behaviour by others; they must be particularly sensitive towards crimes committed by the state, for criminal rulers are the worst of all criminals.[2]

When rulers flout Islamic law or morality, they must be advised to desist, failing which Muslims must protest and rise up against them. The Qur'ān says:

> You are the best of the nations raised up for [the benefit of] men; you enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in God. (3:110)

1. Ibid., Letter 53. This letter is considered as 'one of the earliest records extant, outside the Qur'ānic text and the Prophetic traditions, on the model of rulership, in theory and practice.' See Nasr, *Expectation of New Millennium: Shī'ism in History*, p. 73 and W. C. Chittick, *A Shī'ite Anthology*, 1981, p. 66.
2. cf. Ibid., Letter 26.

> God does not love the public utterance of hurtful speech, unless [it be] by one to whom injustice has been done; and God is Hearing, Knowing. (4:148)

The Prophet Muḥammad said: 'The best struggle (*jihād*) is to utter words of justice in front of an unjust leader.'[1] He also said: 'You must certainly enjoin the good and prohibit the bad; otherwise the evildoers will rule over you such that even when the good people among you pray, their prayers will not be answered.'[2]

The Imāms of the Household of the Prophet constantly resisted oppression by unjust rulers. A sufficient proof of their readiness to undergo all sorts of sacrifice is the simple fact that they all met their deaths through killing (except, of course, the Twelfth Imām who is in Occultation). Many of their followers were also imprisoned or murdered.

The history of the Shī'a is full of struggles and revolutionary movements calling for the implementation of Islamic laws and justice. The most striking and inspiring incident in the entire history of the Shī'a was the tragedy of *Karbalā'*. Explaining his purpose in refusing to pay allegiance to Yaẓīd (the usurpatory Caliph) and rising up against him, Imām Ḥusayn said:

> I see death as salvation, and life with the oppressors as misfortune.[3]

In his *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, Ṭabarī narrates from Imām Ḥusayn:

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1. *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, Vol. 5, p. 60.
2. Ibid., p. 56.
3. Al-Ḥasan ibn Shu'bah al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl*, p. 245.

> O people, whoever witnesses an unjust ruler permitting acts prohibited by God, breaking divine covenants, acting against the Sunnah of the Prophet and treating people sinfully and with enmity – whoever witnesses all this and does not protest in word or in deed will certainly be treated by God in the same way as that oppressor.[1]

The tragic events at Karbalā' and their aftermath showed that Islamic society had seriously deviated from the way of the Prophet Muḥammad. The only hope for saving Islam and the Sunnah of the Prophet and awakening the people was to shock them by means of a very tragic and thought-provoking event, which was the very great sacrifice made by the only surviving grandson of the Prophet. Tens of his relatives and Companions were murdered, and Imām 'Ali b. Ḥusayn and the women and children of the Prophet's family were taken as captives. On his way to Karbalā', Imām Ḥusayn saw the Prophet in his dream telling him that God wished to see him martyred and the women taken captive.

Many people were shaken from their slumber by the tragedy. Several uprisings and oppositional movements took place that culminated in the overthrow of the Umayyads. The Abbasid rulers who succeeded them based their claim to power in part on a call for avenging members of the Household of the Prophet who had been victims of Umayyad oppression. They too, however, deviated from justice, step by step, becoming responsible for the deaths of several Imāms of the Household of the Prophet and many other innocent people. The Shī'a continued their opposition to injustice in whatever way they could.

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1. Vol. 3, p. 307.

Imām Ḥusayn proved that martyrdom is both a sacred goal and an efficient instrument for safeguarding Islamic principles and values and defeating injustice, oppression and heresies. This is why the Prophet said:

> Ḥusayn is from me and I am from him.[1]

Imām Ḥusayn was obviously from the Prophet in the sense that he was his grandson. No such biological argument can, however, be advanced to explain why the Prophet considered himself as being from Imām Ḥusayn. It seems that the Prophet was referring to the fact that the survival of Islam and his Prophetic message would require the brave uprising of Ḥusayn. If Ḥusayn had not been there and his struggle had not happened, true Islam would not have continued. On the day of 'Āshūrā', Imām Ḥusayn himself said:

> If the religion of Muḥammad cannot continue except with my martyrdom, then O swords do embrace me.

The concept of a saviour known as al-Mahdi also relates to the theme of Islamic justice in Islam, especially Shī'a Islam. The foremost task of al-Mahdi and his followers, the first item on their agenda, will be to 'fill the earth with justice', a phrase that occurs in many ḥadīths. For example, the Prophet said:

> We [I and my family] are members of a Household, for whom God has chosen the life of the Hereafter over the life of this world; and the members of my Household shall suffer great

1. Al-Tirmidhī, Kitāb al-Manāqib, Sakhr serial no. 3708, *Sunan* of Ibn Mājah, al-Muqaddimah, Sakhr serial no. 141 and *Musnad of* Ahmad, Musnad al-Shāmiyīn, Sakhr serial no. 16903.

affliction. They will be forcefully expelled from their homes after my death; then there will come people from the East carrying black flags, and they will ask for some good to be given to them, but they shall be refused service; accordingly, they will wage war and emerge victorious, and will be offered that which they desired in the first place, but they will refuse to accept it, and will hand it over to a man from my family who will appear to fill the Earth with justice as it has been filled with corruption. So whoever is alive at that time should go and join them, even if they have to crawl across ice, for among them will be the Vicegerent of Allah (*Khalīfat-ul-lāh*), al-Mahdi.[1]

1. *Sunan* of Ibn Mājah, Kitaāb al-Fitan, Sakhr serial no. 4072.

SIX

The Shī'a in the World

Population

According to UNFPA (United Nation Population Fund) and other sources, the world population exceeded six billion in 1999.[1] Around 20 per cent of the total (that is around 1.2 billion) adhere to Islam. A breakdown of the Muslim population of the world in mid-1998 is estimated as follows:[2]

Africa: 315,000,000
Asia: 812,000,000
Europe: 31,401,000
Latin America: 1,624,000
Northern America: 4,349,000
Oceania: 248,000

1. The world population on January 1, 2002 is estimated to have been 6,196,141,294. (See U.S. Census Bureau official website at www.census.gov).
2. *Britannica, 2002,* Deluxe version. According to this source, the overall Muslim population of the world in mid-1998 was 1,164,622,000, that is, 19.6 per cent of the world population.

Muslims live all over the world. The total number of countries with Muslim inhabitants is 208.[1] The majority of Muslims live to the east of the borders of Iran, especially in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia. Indonesia is the most populous Muslim country. (Chart 1)

Islam is the fastest growing and the second largest religion in the world. Its growth rate exceeds that of the total world population and its percentage of the whole is therefore increasing. Samuel Huntington, the author of the controversial *The Clash of Civilizations*, writes:

> The percentage of Christians in the world peaked at about 30 per cent in the 1980s, levelled off, is now declining, and will probably approximate to about 25 per cent of the world's population by 2025. As a result of their extremely high rates of population growth, the proportion of Muslims in the world will continue to increase dramatically, amounting to 20 per cent of the world's population about the turn of the century, surpassing the number of Christians some years later, and probably accounting for about 30 per cent of the world's population by 2025.[2]

The Shī'a constitute about 10 per cent of the Muslims, or some 120,000,000.[3] For example, *Britannica 2002* reads:

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1. *Britannica, 2002*, Deluxe version.
2. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Touchstone Books, 1998), pp. 65 and 66.
3. The majority are mostly Sunni Muslims consisting of Ḥanafīs (in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey, the Balkans, Central Asia, China), Mālikīs (dominant in Morocco, Sudan and West Africa), Shāfi'īs (in Syria, Yemen, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, East Africa, Malaysia and Indonesia, and co-exists with other schools in Jordan and Egypt) and Ḥanbalīs. According to MEDEA, under the entry 'SUNNISM', the Hanbali school is the official school in Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Over the centuries the Shī'ite movement has deeply influenced all Sunnite Islam, and its adherents numbered about 60 to 80 million in the late 20th century, or one tenth of all Islam. Shī'ism (Arabic: Shī'ah, or Shī'i Islam) is the majority faith in Iran, Iraq, and perhaps Yemen (San'ā') and has adherents in Syria, Lebanon, East Africa, India, and Pakistan.

According to some sources, the figure is 11 per cent.[1] This would give the present Shī'a population of the world as around 132,000,000.[2] A breakdown of the Shī'a population in some Asian countries where Shī'a form a majority or a substantial minority is as follows:[3]

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1. Yann Richard (1991, English translation 1995), p. 2 using mainly figures put forward Md-R. Djalili, *Religion et révolution*, Paris, Economica, 1981, pp. 23ff, and M. Momen, *An Introduction to Shī'i Islam*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1985, pp. 264ff. Thus, Richard's figures relate to no later than the 1980s. His breakdown is as follows: Iraq: 55 per cent, or 18,000,000; Bahrain: 70 per cent, or about 170,000; Kuwait: 24 per cent of the Kuwaiti citizens, or 137,000; Qatar: 20 per cent of the population, or 50,000; United Arab Emirates: 6 per cent, or 60,000; Saudi Arabia: 7 per cent of Saudi citizens, or 440,000; Lebanon: one third of the population, or one million; India: 15 to 20 per cent of the Muslim population, which totals 80 million, or 12 per cent of the total population (Imāmis and Ismailis); Pakistan: 12,000,000; Afghanistan: 15 per cent, or about 2.5 million; Azerbaijan: a large Shī'a community, 4.5 million; Turkey: 1,500,000 apart from 'Alawites; Syria: 50,000 apart from 'Alawites (note: Shī'a and 'Alawites together total 4,900,000).
2. Unfortunately, there are no accurate statistics reflecting the exact number of Muslims in general and Shī'a in particular. What is suggested above is based on the majority of the sources available on the subject. However, it has been suggested that the Shī'a comprise 23 per cent of the Muslims. See S. M. Qazwini, p. 4, taken from the *Bulletin of Affiliation: Al-Madhhab – Schools of Thought*, Vol. 17, no. 4 (December 1998), p. 5.
3. The figures mentioned in the text are according to Britannica 2002, Deluxe Edition. Figures relate to the year 1998. Therefore, the populations must have increased in the last few years. However, the percentages would have remained the same.

   It has to be noted that the list above is not meant to be inclusive; it is a selection based on the collected information from the source on each country. For example, Qatar is missing, while, according to MEDEA, 10 per cent of the population there are Shī'a.

Afghanistan	Population (1998): 24,792,000; Religious affiliation (1990): Sunni Muslim 84 per cent; Shī'i Muslim 15 per cent; other 1 per cent[1]
Azerbaijan	Population (1998): 7,650,000; Religious affiliation (1991): Shī'i Muslim 70 per cent; Sunni Muslim 30 per cent
Bahrain	Population (1998): 633,000; Religious affiliation (1991): Muslim 81.8 per cent, of which Shī'i 61.3 per cent, Sunni 20.5 per cent; Christian 8.5 per cent; other 9.7 per cent[2]
Egypt	Population (1998): 63,261,000; Religious affiliation (1990): Sunni Muslim c. 90 per cent; Christian c. 10 per cent[3]
India	Population (1998): 984,004,000; Religious affiliation (1995): Hindu 81.3 per cent; Muslim 12.0 per cent, of which Sunni 9.0 per cent, Shī'i 3.0 per cent; Christian 2.3 per cent, of which Protestant 1.1 per cent, Roman Catholic 1.0 per cent; Sikh 1.9 per cent; Buddhist 0.8 per cent; Jain 0.4 per cent; Zoroastrian 0.01 per cent; other 1.3 per cent
Iran	Population (1998): 61,531,000; Religious affiliation (1995): Muslim 99.0 per cent, of which Shi'i 93.4 per

1. CIA World Factbook estimates the population of Afghanistan in July 2001 as follows: 26,813,057/ Sunni Muslim 84 per cent, Shī'i Muslim 15 per cent, other 1 per cent. I will refer to this source below as CWF.
2. According to CWF, Shī'a of Bahrain constitute 70 per cent of the Muslim population. According to MEDEA (European Institute for Research on Mediterranean and Euro-Arab Cooperation), 85 per cent of the population are Muslims, of whom one third are Sunni and two thirds are Shī'a (the majority are Arabs but there are also 70.000 Iranians).
3. According to CWF, Muslims (mostly Sunni) comprise 94 per cent of the population of Egypt.

	cent, Sunni 5.6 per cent; Christian 0.3 per cent; Zoroastrian 0.05 per cent; Jewish 0.05 per cent[1]
Iraq	Population (1998): 21,722,000; Religious affiliation (1994): Shī'i Muslim 62.5 per cent; Sunni Muslim 34.5 per cent; Christian (primarily Chaldean rite and Syrian rite Roman Catholic and Nestorian) 2.7 per cent; other (primarily Yazidi syncretist) 0.3 per cent[2]
Jordan	Population (1998): 4,682,000; Religious affiliation (1995): Sunni Muslim 96.5 per cent; Christian 3.5 per cent[3]
Kuwait	Population (1998): 1,866,000; Religious affiliation (1995): Muslim 85 per cent, of which Sunni 45 per cent, Shī'i 30 per cent; other Muslim 10 per cent; other (mostly Christian and Hindu) 15.0 per cent[4]
Lebanon	Population (1998): 3,506,000; Religious affiliation (1995): Muslim 55.3 per cent, of which Shī'i 34.0 per cent, Sunni 21.3 per cent; Christian 37.6 per cent, of which Catholic 25.1 per cent (Maronite 19.0 per cent, Greek Catholic or Melchite 4.6 per cent), Orthodox 11.7 per cent (Greek Orthodox 6.0 per cent, Armenian Apostolic 5.2 per cent), Protestant 0.5 per cent; Druze 7.1 per cent[5]

1. According to CWF, Shī'a constitute 89 per cent of the state's population.
2. According to CWF, Shī'a comprise 60–65 per cent and Sunni 32–37 per cent of the total population. According to MEDEA, Muslims form 97 per cent of the population of Iraq, of whom Shī'a 65 per cent and Sunni 32 per cent.
3. According to CWF (2000 est.), Sunni Muslims form 92 per cent, Christians 6 per cent (majority Greek Orthodox, but some Greek Catholics, Roman Catholics, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox and Protestant denominations) and others 2 per cent (several small Shī'a Muslim and Druze populations).
4. According to CWF and MEDEA, Sunni Muslims of Kuwait constitute 45 per cent and Shī'a 40 per cent.
5. According to CWF, Muslims comprise 70 per cent (including Shī'a, Sunni, Druze, (continued...)

Oman	Population (1998): 2,364,000; Religious affiliation (1993): Muslim 87.7 per cent, of which Ibāḍīyah Muslim c. 75 per cent (principal minorities are Sunni Muslim and Shī'i Muslim); Hindu 7.4 per cent; Christian 3.9 per cent; Buddhist 0.5 per cent; other 0.5 per cent[1]
Pakistan	Population (1998): 141,900,000; Religious affiliation (1993): Muslim 95.0 per cent (mostly Sunni, with Shī'i comprising about 20 per cent of total population); Christian 2.0 per cent; Hindu 1.8 per cent; others (including Aḥmadīyah) 1.2 per cent[2]
Saudi Arabia	Population (1998): 20,786,000; Religious affiliation (1992): Sunni Muslims 93.3 per cent, Shī'i Muslims 3.3 per cent[3]
Syria	Population (1998): 15,335,000; Religious affiliation (1992): Muslim 86.0 per cent, of which Sunni 74.0 per cent, 'Alawite 12.0 per cent; Christian 8.9 per cent; Druze 3.0 per cent; other 1.0 per cent[4]

(...continued)

Ismā'īlite, 'Alawite or Nusayri). According to MEDEA, Muslims are 70 per cent (five legally recognized Islamic groups – Shī'a, Sunni, Druze, Ismā'īlite, 'Alawite or Nusayri) and Christians are 30 per cent (11 legally recognized Christian groups – four Orthodox Christian, six Catholic, one Protestant). Jews form a small percentage.

1. According to CWF, Ibāḍī Muslims form 75 per cent and the rest are Sunni Muslims, Shī'a Muslims and Hindus. According to MEDEA, Muslims are 75 per cent, of whom three quarters belong to the Ibāḍī sect.
2. According to CWF, Muslims are 97 per cent (Sunni 77 per cent and Shī'a 20 per cent). Christians, Hindus and others constitute 3 per cent.
3. CWF does not mention the percentage of Shī'a population in Saudi Arabia, though the number is higher than in some other countries in the table. It simply says that the population is 100 per cent Muslim. According to MEDEA, Shī'a form 2.5 per cent of the total population and Sunni Muslims 97 per cent.
4. According to CWF, Sunni Muslims are 74 per cent. 'Alawite, Druze and other Muslim sects constitute 16 per cent and Christians (various sects) 10 per cent. There are tiny communities of Jews in Damascus, Al-Qamishli and Aleppo. According (continued...)

Turkey	Population (1998): 64,567,000; Religious affiliation (1994): Sunni Muslim c. 80.0 per cent; Shī'i Muslim c. 19.8 per cent, of which non-orthodox 'Alawite c. 14.0 per cent; Christian c. 0.2 per cent[1]
UAE	Population (1998): 2,744,000; Religious affiliation (1995): Muslim 96.0 per cent (Sunni 80.0 per cent, Shī'i 16.0 per cent); other (mostly Christian and Hindu) 4.0 per cent
Yemen	Population (2000): 18,260,000;[2] Religious affiliation (1995): Muslim 99.9 per cent (Sunni c. 60.0 per cent, Shī'i c. 40.0 per cent); other 0.1 per cent[3]

The Shī'a population in some countries is disputed. It may be much higher than official figures suggest, because of either a lack of accurate statistics or political considerations. Thomas S. Szayna (2000) writes in his demographic study of Saudi Arabia in 1997–1998:

> Their [Shī'a] numbers are much disputed, though they number at least 200,000 to 400,000.[4] Shī'a activists claim that half a

(...continued)

to MEDEA, Sunni Muslims are 75 per cent, 'Alawi Muslims 11 per cent, Christians (all rites) 10 per cent and Druze 3 per cent.

1. CWF merely states that 99.8 per cent are Muslims (mostly Sunni) and others (Christians and Jews) are 0.2 per cent. Surprisingly, MEDEA does not refer specifically to the Shī'a population in Turkey, saying only, 'Religions: Muslim 99 per cent Sunni, other 1 per cent (Christian and Jews)' (http://www.medea.be/en/index059.htm).
2. This is according to SESRTCIC affiliated to the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).
3. CWF just states: 'Muslim including Shafi'i (Sunni) and Zaydi (Shi'a), small numbers of Jewish, Christian, and Hindu.' According to MEDEA, Sunni Muslims are 55 per cent, Zaydite Muslims 44 per cent and Christians 1 per cent.
4. *Saudi Arabia Handbook*, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, Washington, Internet Edition.

million Shī'a hide their status and pretend they are Sunni because of the persecution and disadvantages associated with Shī'ism. In their main region of residence (the Eastern Province), the Shī'a represent approximately 33 per cent of the population. Altogether, Shī'a activists claim one million people, or even 25 per cent of the population,[1] though the more generally accepted figure seems to be about 15 per cent.[2] The latter figure would seem to support the claims by Shī'a activists of the existence of substantial numbers of 'hidden Shī'a.'[3]

Holy Cities

Mecca

The holiest city in Islam, Mecca (in Arabic *Makkah*), is located in the Sirat Mountains in the western part of Arabia. The Sirat Mountains include Mount *Ḥirā'*, which contains the cave where the Prophet Muḥammad would withdraw for reflection and worship before the beginning of his mission and where he also began receiving revelation. South of the city lies Mount *Thawr* (2,490 feet/760 metres), which contains the cave in which the Prophet hid from the unbelievers during his migration to Medina. Within the city of Mecca lies the *Ka'bah*, the cube-like structure built by the Prophet Abraham and his son, Prophet Ishmael, on foundations

1. *Mideast Mirror*, August 27, 1996, p. 15.
2. On page 276 the author refers to the CIA estimate of the whole population of the country as 20.1 million (July 1997). The figure includes 5.2 million foreign nationals residing in Saudi Arabia. The author also refers to the latest census figures (September 1992), which gave a total of 16.9 million (of whom 4.6 million were foreign nationals).
3. *Identifying Potential Ethnic Conflict: Application of a Process Model*, pp. 277 and 278.

originally built by the Prophet Adam. All Muslims orient themselves to the Ka'bah in their prayers.

Medina

The second holiest city in Islam, Medina (in Arabic *al-Madīnah*), ancient Yathrib, is located in the western part of Arabia and is some 278 miles (447 km) distant from Mecca by road (215 miles/345 km north of Mecca as the crow flies). Unlike Mecca, Medina is situated in a fertile oasis. Before Islam, the city was inhabited mainly by two tribes, the *Aws* and the *Khazraj*, as well as Jews, some of whom anticipated the appearance there of the last prophet.

In 622 CE, the Prophet Muḥammad emigrated from Mecca to Medina. This emigration is adopted as the beginning of the Islamic calendar in both its lunar and solar forms.[1] Soon Medina became the capital of the Islamic state, founded by the Prophet Muḥammad, and it continued to be so after the conquest of Mecca in 630.

Medina contains many important Islamic sites, including several mosques built in the time of the Prophet Muḥammad and the tombs of great Muslim figures. The most important place in Medina, second only to Mecca in its holiness, is the Mosque of the Prophet (*Masjid al-Nabi*). Inside the Mosque are historically significant places such as the Prophet's pulpit (*minbar*) and the Prophet's place of prayer (*miḥrāb*). The small house of the Prophet Muḥammad was situated next to the original mosque and was absorbed into it when it expanded. When the Prophet died, he was buried inside his house, and this has added to the religious and spiritual significance of the mosque in particular and the city of Medina in general. Every year, millions of Muslims, Shī'as and

1. At the present time (2003 CE), it is the lunar year 1422 and the solar year 1380.

Sunnis from all over the world, visit the mosque and the tomb of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Other objects of pious visitation by all Muslims include the Mosque of *Qūbā*, where the Prophet said his prayers immediately after his arrival in Medina; the Mosque of *Qiblatayn*, where the Prophet was praying when the direction of the prayer was changed by God from Jerusalem to Mecca; and the tombs of Ḥamzah, the uncle of the Prophet and other martyrs of the Battle of *Uḥud*.

The graveyard of *Jannat al-Baqī'* is especially worthy of mention among other important sites in Medina. Many members of the family of the Prophet and his Companions, as well as those who succeeded them, lie buried there. Jannat al-Baqī' is especially important for Shī'a Muslims, since it contains the tombs of Imām Ḥasan, grandson of the Prophet, son of Fāṭima and Imām 'Ali, and the second Imām of the Shī'a; Imām 'Ali b. Ḥusayn, great-grandson of the Prophet, grandson of Fāṭima and Imām 'Ali, and the fourth Imām of the Shī'a; Imām Muḥammad b. 'Ali, fifth Imām and son of the fourth Imām; and Imām Ja'far b. Muḥammad, sixth Imām and son of the fifth Imām. It is likely that Fāṭima, daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad, was also buried in Jannat al-Baqī', although she may have been buried inside the Mosque of the Prophet. The reason for this unique ambiguity is that according to her will she wanted her burial ceremony to be private and her burial place to remain unknown to those who had vexed her in her lifetime.

Jerusalem

One of the holiest cities for all Muslims is Jerusalem (*Bayt al-Maqdis*, *al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, or *al-Quds*). Among religiously significant sites inside Jerusalem is *al-Masjid al-Aqṣā* (the

Farthermost Mosque). Before the Ka'bah was established as the point of orientation for Muslim prayer, al-Quds was the place towards which Muslims were required to turn. This mosque is also the place from which the Prophet ascended to heaven on the night of the Mi'rāj. The Qur'ān says:

> Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go by night journey from the Sacred Mosque (*al-Masjid al-Ḥarām*) to the farthermost mosque (*al-Masjid al-Aqṣā*) of which We have blessed the precincts, so that We may show to him some of Our signs; surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing. (17:1)

Najaf

The city of Najaf is located on a ridge (the name means 'ridge') in central Iraq, a few miles west of the Euphrates River and near the city of Kufa. The city was founded by the Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd in 791 CE around the tomb of Imām 'Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, the fourth Caliph and the first Imām of Shī'a Muslims. The city has long been a centre of Shī'a pilgrimage and learning.

Karbala

The city of Karbala (*Karbalā'*) is located in central Iraq 55 miles (88 km) from Baghdad, on the border between the desert and the agricultural region. Karbala is one of the holiest places for Shī'a Muslims, for this is where Imām Ḥusayn and members of his family and his followers were buried after their martyrdom in the Battle of Karbala in 680 CE His shrine and that of his brother, Abu al-Faḍl al-

'Abbās, as well as the tombs of other martyrs are all located in Karbala. The old city containing the shrines is enclosed by a wall, and modern Karbala has grown to its south.

Kazimayn

Kazimayn (*Kāẓimayn*) is part of the city of Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. Originally the town was a cemetery belonging to the Quraysh, the tribe to which the Prophet and his Household belonged. After their martyrdom, the seventh and ninth Imāms of the Shī'a, Mūsā b. Ja'far al-Kāẓim and Muḥammad b. 'Ali al-Jawād, were buried there. The place was frequently visited by Shī'a and others who loved the progeny of the Prophet, and gradually the town of Kazimayn (in Arabic, the dual form of Kāẓim) was formed. In 336 AH Mu'izz al-Dawlah rebuilt the twin tombs. He also constructed a courtyard around the shrines lined with a series of rooms to house students of religion. There was also a lecture room on the eastern side of the shrine, called a *madras* (place of study).

Samarra

The city of Samarra (Sāmarrā') is situated on the east bank of the Tigris, 70 miles (97 km) north of Baghdad. The city is the site of a prehistoric settlement dating from the fifth millennium BC. It was founded between the third and seventh centuries AD. In 836, the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mu'taṣim made Samarra his new capital. The city kept growing till the Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'tamid shifted the capital back to Baghdad. By this time, the city extended 20 miles (32 km) along the river It has been suggested (Ernst Grube, 1996) that the name goes back to pre-Islamic times and has been imprinted on the

coins of the Caliphs of Samarra (836–892) as an abbreviated form of *Surr man ra'ā* meaning 'delighted is he who sees [it]'.[1]

Samarra is regarded highly by Shī'a Muslims because their tenth and eleventh Imāms, 'Ali b. Muḥammad al-Hādī and Ḥasan b. 'Ali al-'Askarī, were confined there in a military camp by the Caliph of the time. Finally they were martyred and buried there. Before his occultation, the Twelfth Imām lived there too (255–260 AH).

Mashhad

The city of Mashhad (in Arabic *mashhad* means the place of martyrdom or witnessing) is situated in a fertile region in northeast Iran. Mashhad grew up around the site of the burial of Imām 'Ali b. Mūsā al-Riḍā, the eighth Imām of the Shī'a, who was martyred there in 818 CE. Both the shrine and the city developed first under the Timurids in the 15th century, overshadowing the nearby city of Ṭūs, and was greatly expanded by the Safavids from the 16th century onwards. Nādir Shāh (r. 1736–1747) chose Mashhad to be his capital. Every year millions of Muslims visit the shrine of Imām al-Riḍā. Mashhad is also the site of some of the leading Shī'a seminaries, from which many great scholars have graduated.

1. A. Northedge says: 'The caliph's city was formally called Surra Man Ra'ā ('he who sees it is delighted'). According to Yāqūt, this original name was later shortened in popular usage to the present Sāmarrā'. It seems more probable, however, that Sāmarrā' is the Arabic version of the pre-Islamic toponym, and that Surra Man Ra'ā, a verbal form of name unusual in Arabic which recalls earlier Akkadian and Sumerian practices, is a word-play invented at the caliph's court.' (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, CD-ROM Edition, v. 1.0, 1999).

Qum

The city of Qum is situated in north-central Iran on both banks of the river of the same name, 92 miles (147 km) south of Tehran. Since the first century of Islam, Qum has always been one of the leading centres of support for the school of the Household of the Prophet and of knowledge for Shī'a Muslims. At the time of Ḥajjāj b. Yusuf al-Thaqafī, a group of Shī'a from the Ash'arī clan migrated from Kufa to Qum and settled there. 'Abdullāh b. Sa'd al-Ash'arī was their spiritual guide and teacher, and later his children started to preach Islam and propagate the teachings of the Prophet and his Household. Later, Ibrāhim b. Hāshim, a Companion of the eighth Imām and a pupil of the great traditionist and scholar Yunus b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān, settled in Qum and contributed to the cultivation of the Islamic sciences, especially the science of ḥadīth.

In 816 CE, Fāṭima al-Ma'ṣūmah, sister of the eighth Imām, became ill while travelling from Medina to visit her brother in Marv. She asked her companions to take her to Qum. She died in Qum. Her burial place in Qum has been visited by Shī'a Muslims generation after generation. In the 17th century a golden-domed edifice with tall minarets was built over the tomb. Several rulers and many scholars and saintly figures are interred in Qum.

In 1340 AH, Ayatollah 'Abd al-Karīm al-Ḥā'irī, director of the teaching institution in the northwestern city of Arak, went on pilgrimage to the city of Qum. Yielding to pressure from the scholars and people of the city, he decided to settle there and revivify its institutions of learning. After the advent of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, led by Ayatollah Khomeini and his students and fellow scholars, Qum became the spiritual centre of the state, and greater attention was paid to the learned institutions of

Qum. Qum is now the leading centre of Islamic learning in the world. More than two hundred educational or research institutes and organizations operate there, and tens of thousands of scholars and students from different parts of the world are engaged in studying the various Islamic sciences.

The important Mosque of Jamkarān is situated on the outskirts of Qum. According to Shi'te traditionists and historians, this mosque was built in Ramaḍān 393 AH by Ḥasan b. Muthleh Jamkarānī in obedience to a command he had received from the Twelfth Imām. Every Tuesday and Thursday night, tens of thousands of pilgrims from different cities visit this mosque to perform their prayers.

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